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MIGHTIEST MONARCH OF A TIME-LOST LAND!
KING CONAN™
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FOR THE RING OF RAKHAMON, AND THE LIFE OF HIS QUEEN, CONAN MUST BATTLE--
--THE SORCERER IN THE REALM OF MADNESS!

Stan Lee PRESENTS:
KING CONAN
Featuring The Epic Adventurer Created By ROBERT E. HOWARD
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THE BATTLE OF YANYOGA IS OVER*... THOTH-AMON HAS PERISHED AND SCATTERED LIKE DUST TO THE FOUR WINDS... AND NOW THE ARMY OF AQUILONIA IS HEADED NORTH AGAIN, FROM THE PLACE WHICH MEN CALL THE WORLD'S EDGE...
WHAT'S WRONG, YOUR MAJESTY-- IF I MAY BE SO BOLD?
YOU LOOK FAR TOO SOMBRE FOR A MAN WHO'S RECENTLY SLAIN HIS WORST ENEMY, AND NOW CARRIES NEWS OF THE TRIUMPH BACK TO HIS ROYAL CAPITAL.
THAT'S JUST IT, TROCERO...
*LAST ISSUE, --ROY.
WE CARRY THAT NEWS FAR TOO SLOWLY TO SUIT ME.
IT'S BEEN WELL NIGH A YEAR, AFTER ALL, THAT I'VE BEEN SEPARATED FROM ZENOBIA.
AH, SO MY KING DOES MISS HIS QUEEN, EH?
I MUST CONFESS, SIRE, I DOUBTED ANY ONE WOMAN COULD EVER MEAN SO MUCH TO YOU.
SO DID I, COUNT. BUT WHEN YOU'VE LIVED WITH A WOMAN SO LONG... HAD THREE CHILDREN BY HER...
WELL, DAMN IT ALL... I MISS HER!
I'M WHAT YOU CIVILIZED MEN WOULD CALL... HOME-SICK...
...UNLIKE YOUNG PRINCE CONN BACK THERE, FOR WHOM THIS WAS VERY NEARLY HIS FIRST TASTE OF REAL ADVENTURE!

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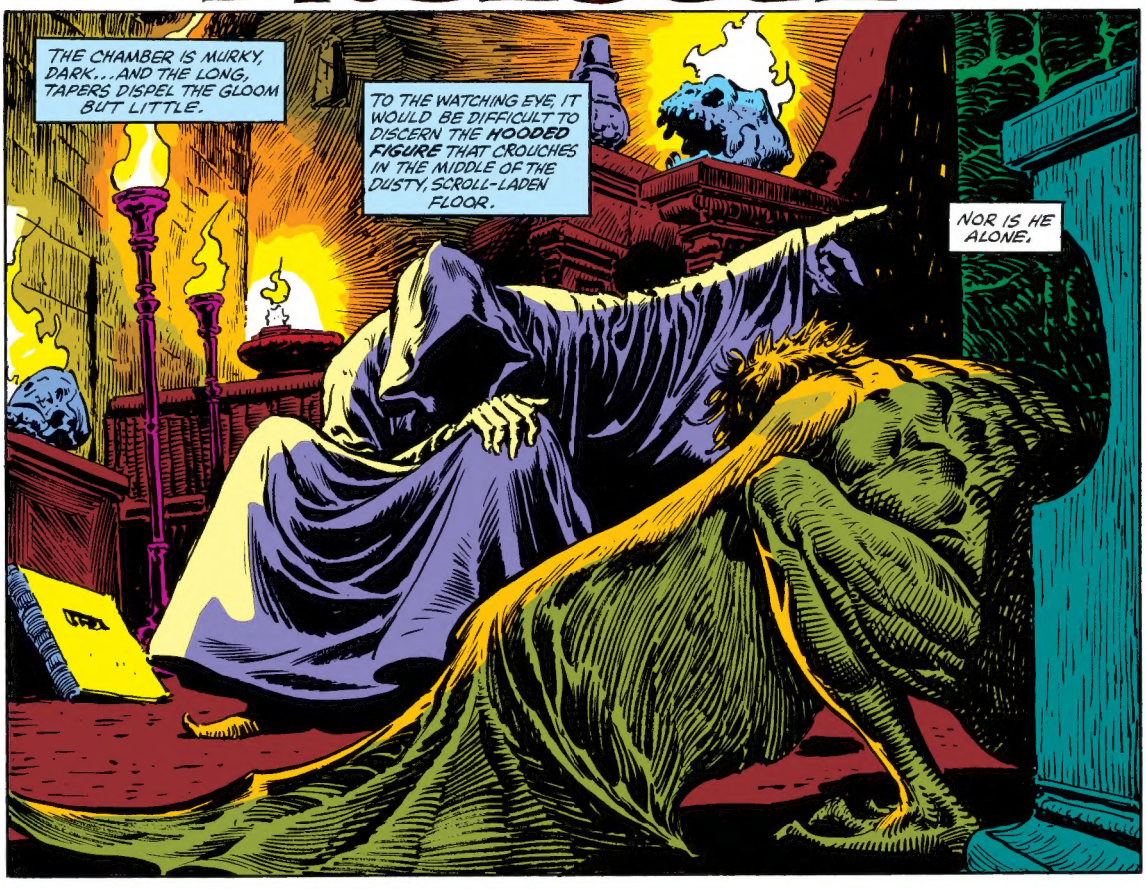
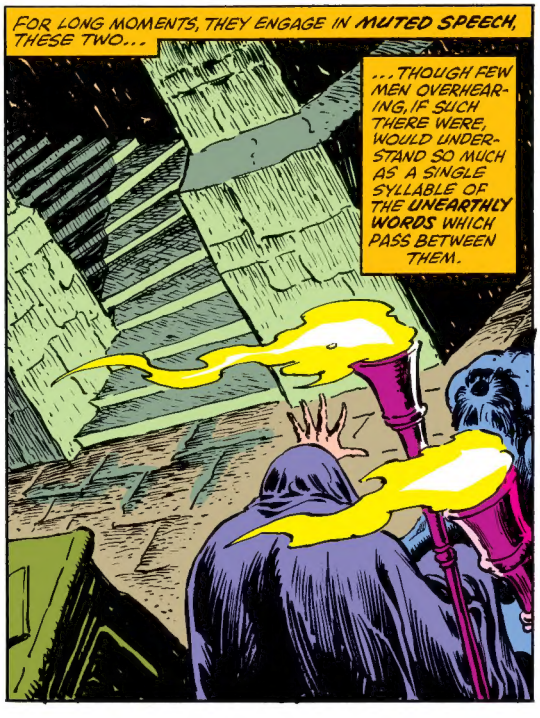
THAT NIGHT, ARMED SENTRIES PATROL THE OUTER PERIMETERS OF THE AQUILONIAN CAMP...
FOR, FOOLISH THE MAN IN THIS HYBORIAN AGE WHO LOWERS HIS GUARD, EVEN WHEN ALL HIS FOES SEEM DEAD OR DEFEATED.
WITHIN THE CAMP, HOWEVER, KING CONAN'S MIND IS ELSEWHERE...
I SWEAR I DON'T UNDERSTAND MY FATHER SOMETIMES, COUNT TROCERO...
FROM WHAT LITTLE HE'S TOLD ME, HIS YOUTH WAS FULL OF DANGER, EXCITEMENT...AND HE REVELED IN IT.
HE'S STILL TWICE THE FIGHTER OF ANY MAN ALIVE...
AT LEAST, YOUNG PRINCE!
...YET RATHER THAN ADD NEW CONQUESTS ON OUR ROAD NORTH, HE MARCHES STRAIGHT FOR HOME LIKE ANY TWENTY-YEAR-MAN EAGER ONLY TO COLLECT HIS PENSION!
YOU GREATLY EXAGGERATE YOUR SIRE'S MOOD, PRINCE CONN... BUT YOU'LL UNDERSTAND MORE, WHEN YOU GET OLDER.
OLDER! THAT'S WHAT EVERYONE ALWAYS SAYS!
AND ALWAYS WILL, BECAUSE IT'S ALWAYS TRUE.
YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER, AFTER ALL, HAVE BEEN THROUGH ADVENTURES AS PERILOUS AS EVEN THE PURSUIT OF THOTH-AMON, YOU KNOW.
YES, I'VE HEARD VAGUE HINTS OF THAT, BUT NO ONE HAS EVER TOLD ME THE FULL STORY.
THAT'S BECAUSE YOUR MOTHER, GENTLE SOUL, WOULD SOONER FORGET THEM...AND YOUR FATHER'S NOT GIVEN TO BOASTING.
I KNOW OF HOW HE MET HER, AND SAVED HER FROM THE MANOTAUR OF NEMEDIA...
BUT WILL YOU TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THAT?
WHY NOT? IT'S A LONG TREK NORTH.
IT BEGAN WHEN YOUR PARENTS HAD BEEN MARRIED ONLY A FEW MONTHS...AND YOU WERE NOT YET EVEN A TWINKLE IN YOUR FATHER'S STEEL-BLUE EYES...
THEN, COUNT TROCERO IS LOST IN THOUGHTS...AND MEMORIES...

AND WHEN HE SPEAKS AGAIN, HE RELATES HIS TALE ALMOST LIKE ONE IN A TRANCE, FOR WHOM THESE EVENTS ARE OCCURRING **NOW**, NOT NEARLY A DECADE AND A HALF AGONE:

PROLOGUE:


THE CHAMBER IS MURKY, DARK...AND THE LONG, TAPERS DISPEL THE GLOOM BUT LITTLE.
TO THE WATCHING EYE, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO DISCERN THE **HOODED FIGURE** THAT CROUCHES IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DUSTY, SCROLL-LADEN FLOOR.
NOR IS HE ALONE.


FOR LONG MOMENTS, THEY ENGAGE IN **MUTED SPEECH**, THESE TWO...
...THOUGH FEW MEN OVERHEARING, IF SUCH THERE WERE, WOULD UNDERSTAND SO MUCH AS A SINGLE SYLLABLE OF THE **UNEARTHLY WORDS** WHICH PASS BETWEEN THEM.

THEN, THERE IS A **GUST OF WIND** THROUGH THE ROOM, LIKE THE SWEEP OF **GIGANTIC WINGS**.
THE TAPERS FLICKER MADLY...
...AND THE HOODED FIGURE IS SUDDENLY ALONE, AT LAST.

IT IS A NIGHT FOR **FEASTING** IN TARANTIA, CAPITAL OF PROUD AQUILONIA.

AND WHY SHOULD IT NOT BE? AFTER ALL, IT HAS BEEN MORE THAN A YEAR, SINCE KING **TARASCUS OF NEMEDIA**, AIDED BY THE UNDEAD WIZARD **XALTOTUN**, ATTEMPTED TO CONQUER THIS GREATEST OF HYBORIAN KINGDOMS.

THE RING OF RAKHAMON!

BEGINNING OUR ADAPTATION OF THE NOVEL *CONAN THE AVENGER*, BY BJÖRN NYBERG & L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

THE NEMEDIAN SCHEME FAILED, HEAVY DAMAGES WERE EXACTED...

AND NOW, THE ONLY DISORDERS ARE THE INTERMITTENT RAIDS OF THE SAVAGE **PICTS** ON THE WESTERN BORDER... RAIDS HELD IN CHECK BY SEASONED TROOPS ALONG THE **THUNDER RIVER**.

NO THOUGHT OF PICTS OR NEMEDIANS THIS NIGHT, HOWEVER,... FOR THIS IS THE NIGHT KING CONAN GIVES A **ROYAL BALL** IN HONOR OF HIS BELOVED **ZENOBIA**.

NO DOUBT SOME OF THE ASSEMBLED LORDS AND LADIES WHISPER OF HOW THEIR NEW QUEEN WAS ONCE A VIRTUAL **SLAVE** IN THE HAREM OF NEMEDIA'S MURDEROUS RULER.

BUT, SHE HELPED CONAN ESCAPE TARASCUS' DUNGEONS, AND THE GRATEFUL CIMMERIAN-- HIMSELF A USURPER OF THRONES-- HAD MADE HER HIS **WIFE**.

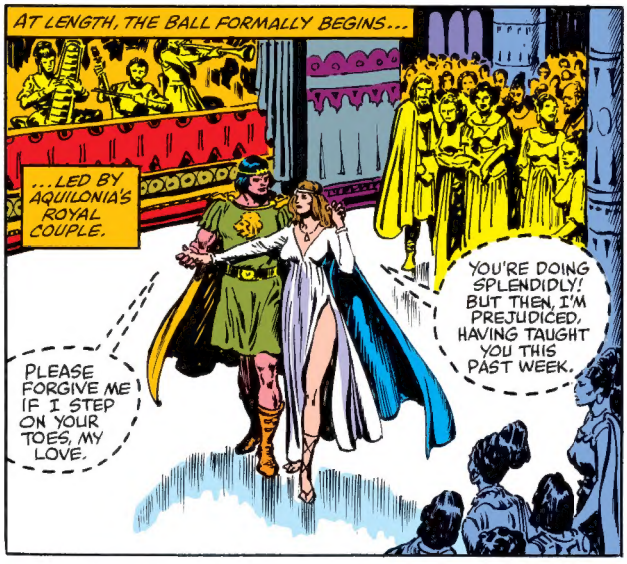
HE HAS MASTERED HER **HEART**, THESE PAST FEW MONTHS OF MARRIAGE...

AND SHE, IN TURN, HAS MADE HIM MORE AMENABLE TO THE PLEASANTRIES OF SUCH COURTLY EVENTS AS THIS, WHICH ARE ALIEN TO HIS BARBAROUS NATURE:

SO **PLEASED** YOU COULD BE HERE THIS EVENING, COUNTESS ALBIONA.

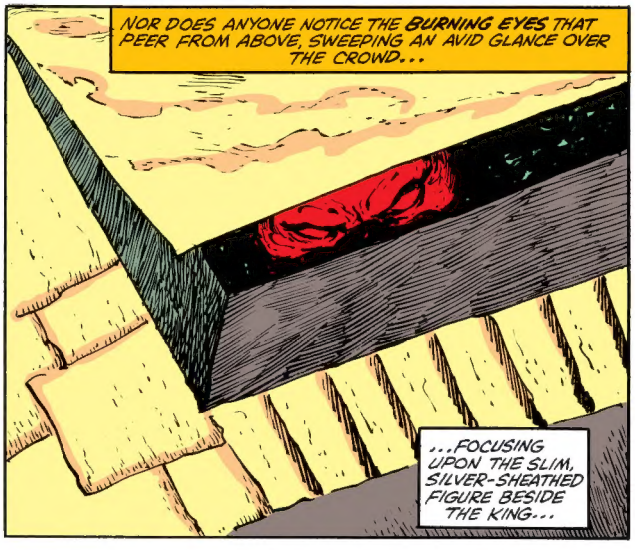
AND YOUR NEW HUSBAND, *COUNT NESTOR*.

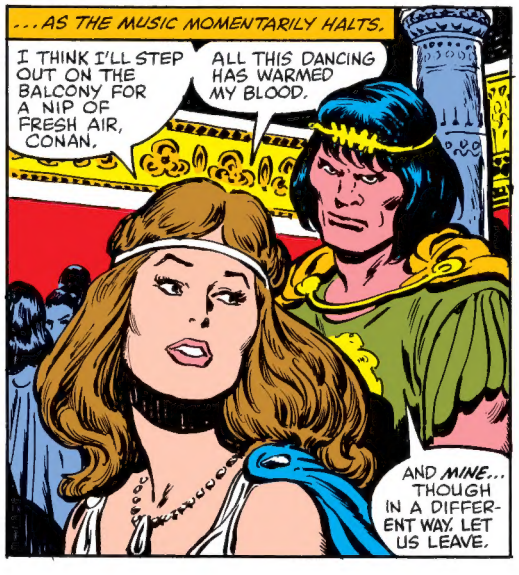
IT IS **MY** PLEASURE, YOUR MAJESTIES, TO DO HOMAGE TO AQUILONIA'S GRACIOUS QUEEN... AND TO MY OWN GOOD **FRIEND**.

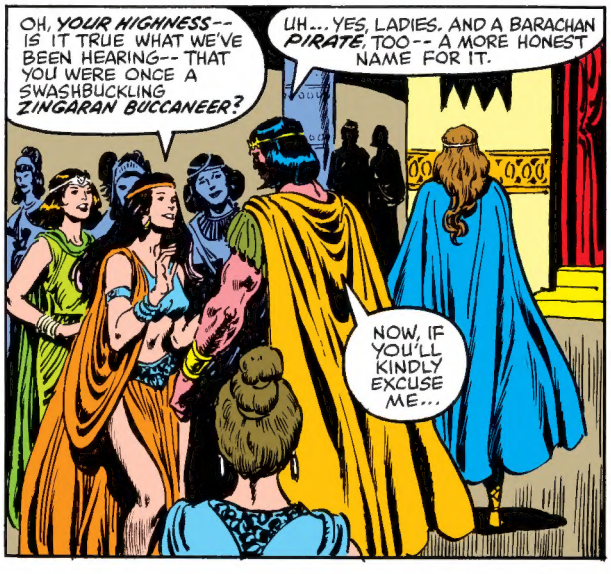

AT LENGTH, THE BALL FORMALLY BEGINS...
...LED BY AQUILONIA'S ROYAL COUPLE.
PLEASE FORGIVE ME IF I STEP ON YOUR TOES, MY LOVE.
YOU'RE DOING SPLENDIDLY! BUT THEN, I'M PREJUDICED, HAVING TAUGHT YOU THIS PAST WEEK.

EVERYONE IN THE GLITTERING THRONG FOLLOWS SUIT, TILL COUPLES MILL COLORFULLY ON THE POLISHED FLOOR...

AND NO ONE NOTICES THE SILENT DRAFT THAT BEGINS TO WAFT THROUGH THE AIR...
...CAUSING THE FLAMING TORCHES TO FLICKER AND TREMBLE.


NOR DOES ANYONE NOTICE THE BURNING EYES THAT PEER FROM ABOVE, SWEEPING AN AVID GLANCE OVER THE CROWD...
...FOCUSING UPON THE SLIM, SILVER-SHEATHED FIGURE BESIDE THE KING...

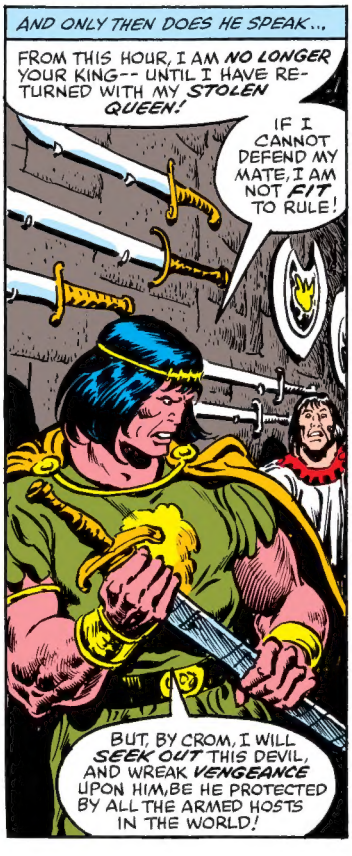

...AS THE MUSIC MOMENTARILY HALTS,
I THINK I'LL STEP OUT ON THE BALCONY FOR A NIP OF FRESH AIR, CONAN.
ALL THIS DANCING HAS WARMED MY BLOOD.
AND MINE... THOUGH IN A DIFFERENT WAY. LET US LEAVE.


OH, YOUR HIGHNESS-- IS IT TRUE WHAT WE'VE BEEN HEARING-- THAT YOU WERE ONCE A SWASHBUCKLING ZINGARAN BUCCANEER?
UH... YES, LADIES. AND A BARACHAN PIRATE, TOO-- A MORE HONEST NAME FOR IT.
NOW, IF YOU'LL KINDLY EXCUSE ME...

BUT, I'VE HEARD YOU WERE ONCE A CHIEFTAIN OF THE WILD HORDES IN HALF-FABULOUS GHULISTAN, WAY OFF IN THE HIMELIAN MOUNTAINS!
NOT SO! WHAT HE REALLY DID, YEARS AGO, IS SAVE THE QUEEN OF KHAURAN FROM A BUNCH OF SHEMITE PLUNDERERS, ISN'T THAT RIGHT, SIRE?
I FEAR I MUST PLEAD GUILTY ON ALL COUNTS, LADIES.
BECOMING YOUR KING IS PROBABLY THE FIRST HONEST DAY'S WORK I'VE EVER DONE.
OH, YOUR MAJESTY... YOU ARE SO AMUSING!
NOW, FORGIVE ME, BUT I REALLY MUST JOIN MY QUEEN, SO--
EEEEE
EEEEEEEEEEE
ZENOBIA!
OUT OF MY WAY, MAN!
THE SCREAM IS ALREADY DWINDLING AS THE BARBARIAN-KING SPRINGS FORWARD, UPSETTING NOBLE GUESTS AND WINE-LADEN TABLES--
--AND, WHEN HE REACHES THE BALCONY IN PANTHER-ISH STRIDES, ONLY SECONDS LATER, ZENOBIA IS--
GONE!?
BUT--THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE!
INSTINCTIVELY, CONAN'S GLANCE RAKES THE UNSCALABLE SIDES OF THE PALACE, BUT SEES... NOTHING.
THEN, AS HE LIFTS HIS GAZE SKYWARD--
CROM'S DEVILS!

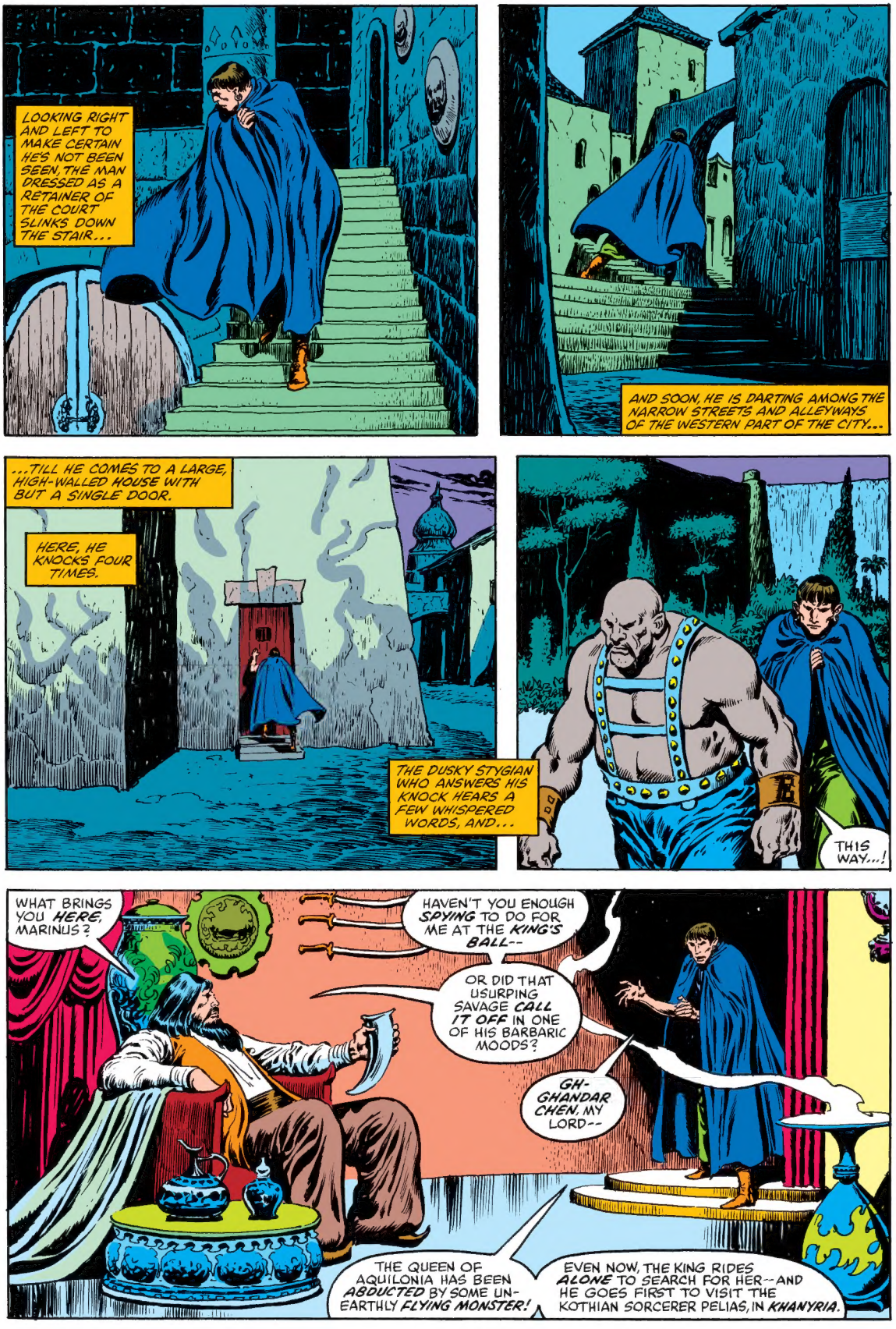
ZENOBIA...!

FOR A LONG MOMENT, CONAN STANDS TRANSFIXED.
THEN, AS HE STRIDES BACK INSIDE, HIS GUESTS SHRINK AWAY AS IF HE HAS BECOME THE VERY MONSTER THAT HAS CARRIED OFF HIS QUEEN.
WORDLESSLY, HE MAKES FOR THE WEAPON-LADEN NETHER WALL, WHERE HANGS A PLAIN BUT HEAVY BROADSWORD THAT HAS SERVED HIM WELL IN MANY A CAMPAIGN...

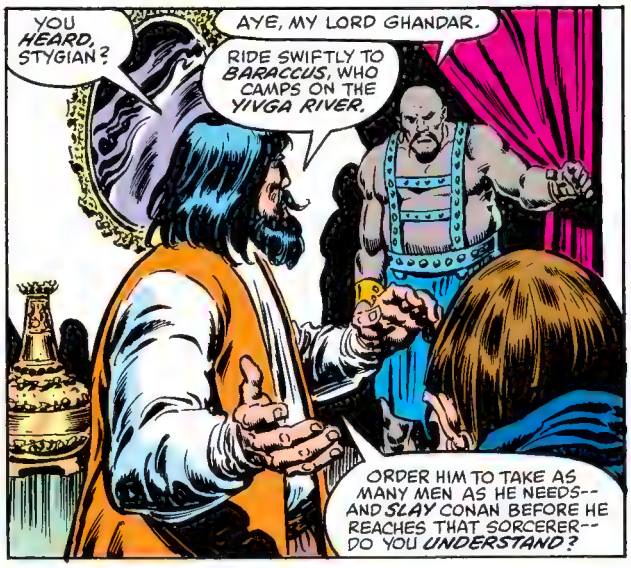

AND ONLY THEN DOES HE SPEAK...
FROM THIS HOUR, I AM NO LONGER YOUR KING-- UNTIL I HAVE RE-TURNED WITH MY STOLEN QUEEN!
IF I CANNOT DEFEND MY MATE, I AM NOT FIT TO RULE!
BUT, BY CROM, I WILL SEEK OUT THIS DEVIL, AND WREAK VENGEANCE UPON HIM, BE HE PROTECTED BY ALL THE ARMED HOSTS IN THE WORLD!

THEN, OPENING WIDE HIS MOUTH, THE KING VOICES A WEIRD AND TERRIBLE CALL THAT ECHOES SHUDDERINGLY THROUGH THE HALL...
IT RINGS LIKE THE CRY OF DOOMED SOULS...AND THE EERIE HORROR OF ITS TONES TURNS MANY A FACE ASHEN.

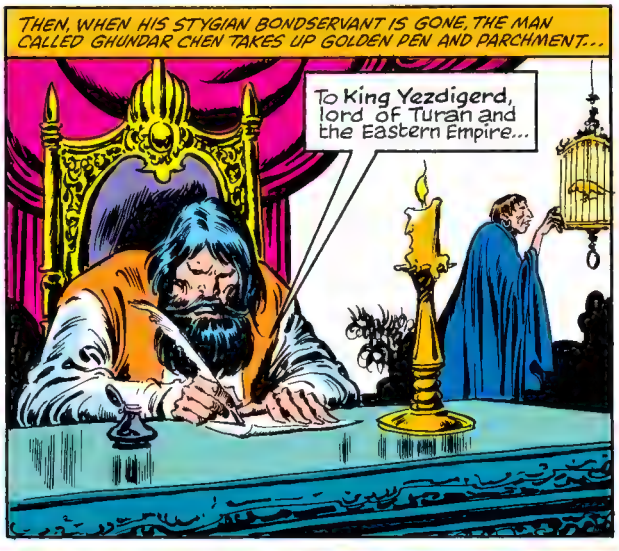
NEXT MOMENT, WITH A TIGERISH TREAD...HE IS GONE
WH-WHAT WAS THAT AWFUL SHOUT, THAT FROZE THE BLOOD IN MY VEINS?
THE BATTLE CRY OF THE CIMMERIAN TRIBES, MILADY.
IT IS VOICED ONLY WHEN THEY ARE ABOUT TO FLING THEMSELVES INTO BATTLE WITH UTTER ABANDON--AND WITH NO CONCERN OTHER THAN TO KILL.
I HEARD IT THIRTY YEARS AGO, WHEN THE BLACK-MANED BARBARIANS SWARMED OVER THE WALLS AT THE SACK OF VENARIUM--AND I HAD HOPED NEVER TO HEAR IT AGAIN!
MINUTES LATER...
BUT MY KING...
NO, PROSPERO--NO! I WILL TRAVEL ALONE!
IF I TAKE OUR LEGIONS WITH ME, OUR PEACE-LOVING NEIGHBOR NATIONS MAY SEIZE THE CHANCE TO STRIKE.
BUT, SIRE--WE CANNOT LET YOU RISK YOUR LIFE ON SUCH AN UNCERTAIN QUEST.
LET TROCERO AND ME RIDE WITH YOU, AT LEAST...!
NO, MY GOOD GENERAL AND FRIEND... I FEEL I'M DESTINED TO FREE MY QUEEN ALONE.
YOU SHALL COMMAND THE ARMY IN MY ABSENCE... TROCERO, THE KINGDOM.
IF I'M NOT BACK IN TWO YEARS--CHOOSE A NEW KING!
NOW, A HORSE, PROSPERO! I RIDE AT ONCE TO FIND PELIAS OF KOTH, WHO DWELLS IN KHANYRIA, IN KHORAJA.
WHAT, SIRE? THAT--WIZARD!?
AYE, THAT WIZARD WHO AIDED ME WHEN TSOTHA-LANTI HAD DEFEATED AND IMPRISONED ME, SEVERAL YEARS AGO. *
*"THE SCARLET CITADEL," IN SAVAGE SWORD #30. --ROY.
I SMELL DARK SORCERY IN TONIGHT'S HAPPENINGS, MY FRIENDS; THAT FLYING CREATURE WAS NO EARTHLY BIRD.
I CARE LITTLE FOR WIZARDS, CROM AND MITRA KNOW--BUT NOW I NEED PELIAS' ADVICE.
I RIDE TONIGHT--GARBED AS A COMMON MERCENARY.

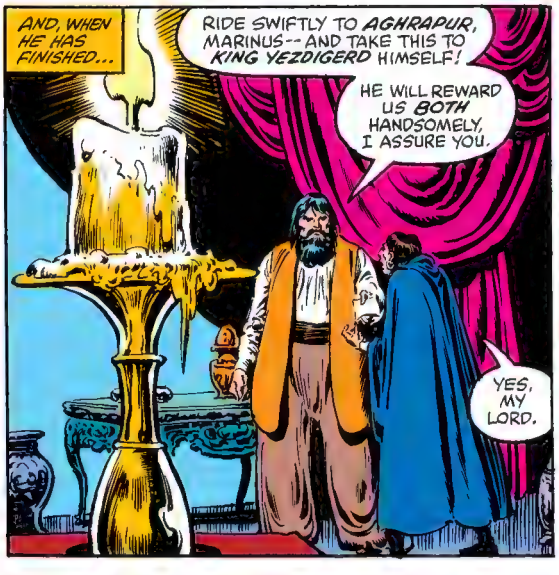

LOOKING RIGHT AND LEFT TO MAKE CERTAIN HE'S NOT BEEN SEEN, THE MAN DRESSED AS A RETAINER OF THE COURT SLINKS DOWN THE STAIR...
AND SOON, HE IS DARTING AMONG THE NARROW STREETS AND ALLEYWAYS OF THE WESTERN PART OF THE CITY...
...TILL HE COMES TO A LARGE, HIGH-WALLED HOUSE WITH BUT A SINGLE DOOR.
HERE, HE KNOCKS FOUR TIMES.
THE DUSKY STYGIAN WHO ANSWERS HIS KNOCK HEARS A FEW WHISPERED WORDS, AND...
THIS WAY...!
WHAT BRINGS YOU *HERE*, MARINUS?
HAVEN'T YOU ENOUGH *SPYING* TO DO FOR ME AT THE *KING'S BALL*--
OR DID THAT USURPING SAVAGE *CALL IT OFF* IN ONE OF HIS BARBARIC MOODS?
GH-GHANDAR CHEN, MY LORD--
THE QUEEN OF AQUILONIA HAS BEEN *ABDUCTED* BY SOME UN-EARTHLY *FLYING MONSTER!*
EVEN NOW, THE KING RIDES *ALONE* TO SEARCH FOR HER--AND HE GOES FIRST TO VISIT THE KOTHIAN SORCERER PELIAS, IN *KHANYRIA*.

BY ERLIK! THIS IS NEWS INDEED!
FIVE OF MY BEST POISONERS HANG ON THE HILL OF EXECUTION, SO MUCH KITE'S MEAT--
--BUT NOW, CONAN WILL BE ALONE--AND IN FOREIGN LANDS?!
YES, MY LORD.

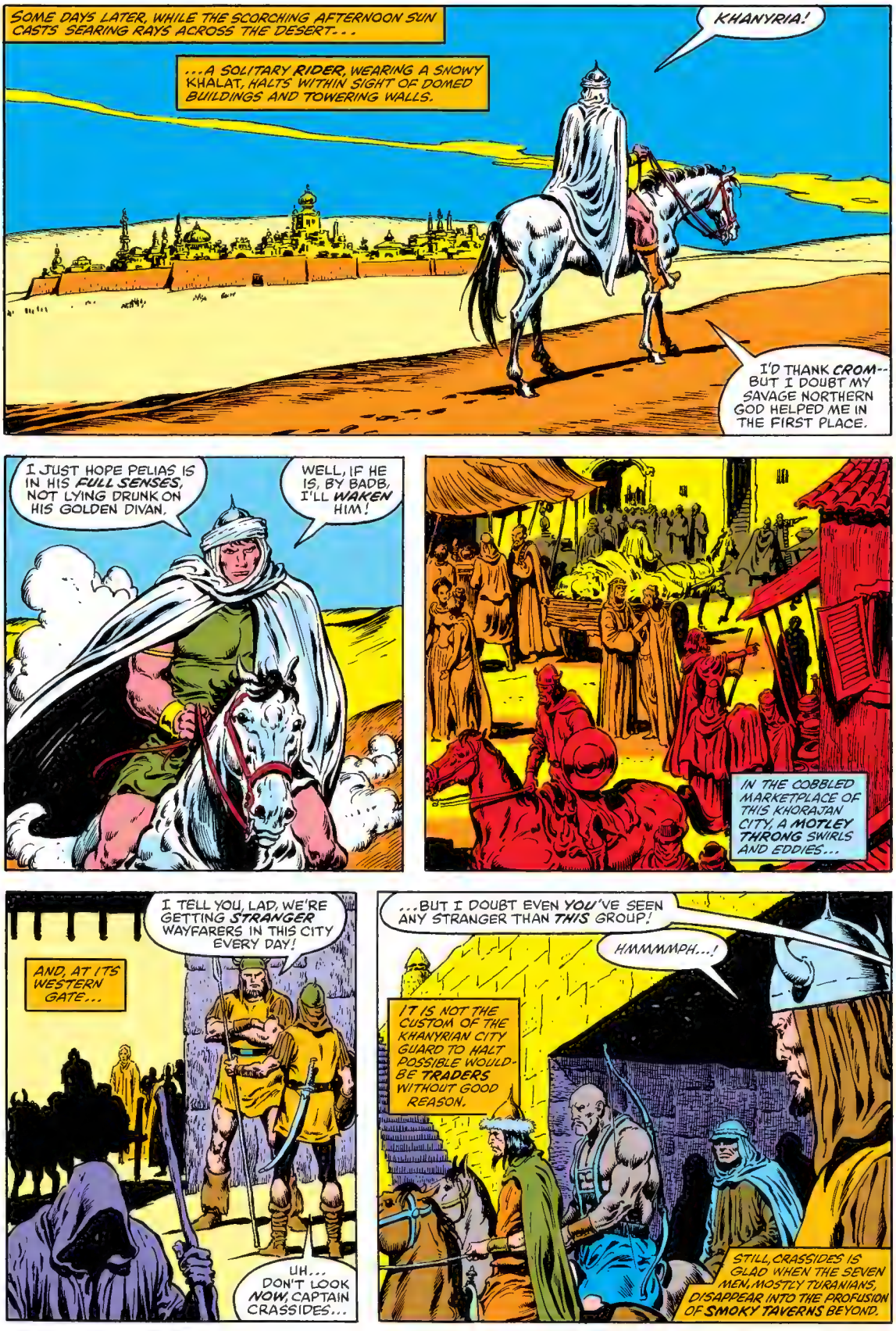

YOU HEARD, STYGIAN?
AYE, MY LORD GHANDAR.
RIDE SWIFTLY TO BARACCUS, WHO CAMPS ON THE YIVGA RIVER.
ORDER HIM TO TAKE AS MANY MEN AS HE NEEDS--AND SLAY CONAN BEFORE HE REACHES THAT SORCERER--DO YOU UNDERSTAND?

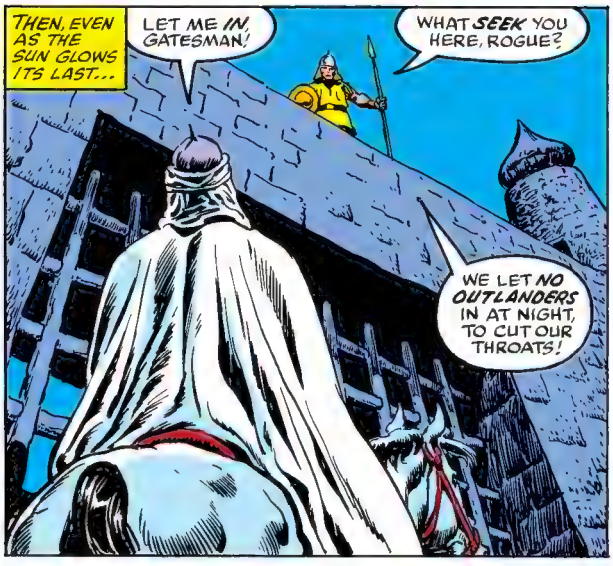
WELL DO I KNOW CONAN, MASTER--SINCE HE CRUSHED THE HOST OF PRINCE KATUMUN OUTSIDE KHORAJA*...
...AND I ALONE ESCAPED, ONLY TO BE SOLD INTO SLAVERY.
LONG HAVE I WAITED FOR MY REVENGE; IF POSSIBLE, I WILL SLAY THE DOG MYSELF!
I GO AT ONCE, MASTER!
*SEE "BLACK COLOSSUS," SAVAGE SWORD #2. --R.T.


THEN, WHEN HIS STYGIAN BONDSERVANT IS GONE, THE MAN CALLED GHUNDAR CHEN TAKES UP GOLDEN PEN AND PARCHMENT...
To King Yezdigerd, lord of Turan and the Eastern Empire...


AND, WHEN HE HAS FINISHED...
RIDE SWIFTLY TO AGHRAPUR, MARINUS--AND TAKE THIS TO KING YEZDIGERD HIMSELF!
HE WILL REWARD US BOTH HANDSOMELY, I ASSURE YOU.
YES, MY LORD.

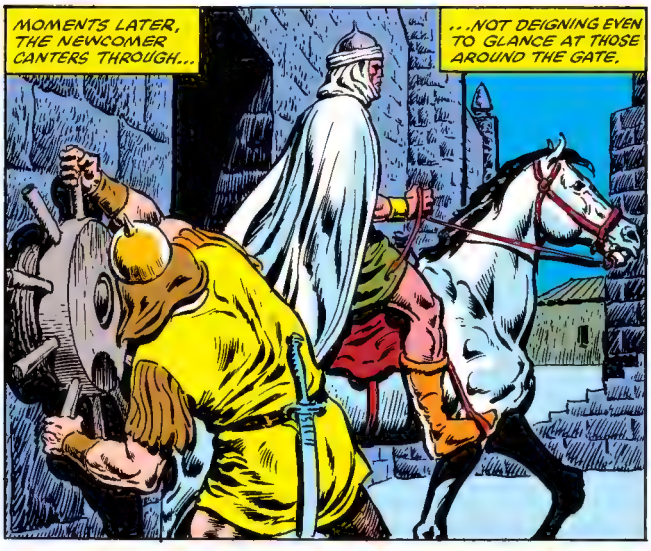
YES... VERY HANDSOMELY, INDEED...!


SOME DAYS LATER, WHILE THE SCORCHING AFTERNOON SUN CASTS SEARING RAYS ACROSS THE DESERT...
...A SOLITARY RIDER, WEARING A SNOWY KHALAT, HALTS WITHIN SIGHT OF DOMED BUILDINGS AND TOWERING WALLS.
KHANYRIA!
I'D THANK CROM--BUT I DOUBT MY SAVAGE NORTHERN GOD HELPED ME IN THE FIRST PLACE.
I JUST HOPE PELIAS IS IN HIS FULL SENSES, NOT LYING DRUNK ON HIS GOLDEN DIVAN.
WELL, IF HE IS, BY BADB, I'LL WAKEN HIM!
IN THE COBBLED MARKETPLACE OF THIS KHORAJAN CITY, A MOTLEY THRONG SWIRLS AND EDDIES...
I TELL YOU, LAD, WE'RE GETTING STRANGER WAYFARERS IN THIS CITY EVERY DAY!
AND, AT ITS WESTERN GATE...
UH... DON'T LOOK NOW, CAPTAIN CRASSIDES...
...BUT I DOUBT EVEN YOU'VE SEEN ANY STRANGER THAN THIS GROUP!
HMMMMPH...!
IT IS NOT THE CUSTOM OF THE KHANYRIAN CITY GUARD TO HALT POSSIBLE WOULD-BE TRADERS WITHOUT GOOD REASON.
STILL, CRASSIDES IS GLAD WHEN THE SEVEN MEN, MOSTLY TURANIANS, DISAPPEAR INTO THE PROFUSION OF SMOKY TAVERNS BEYOND.

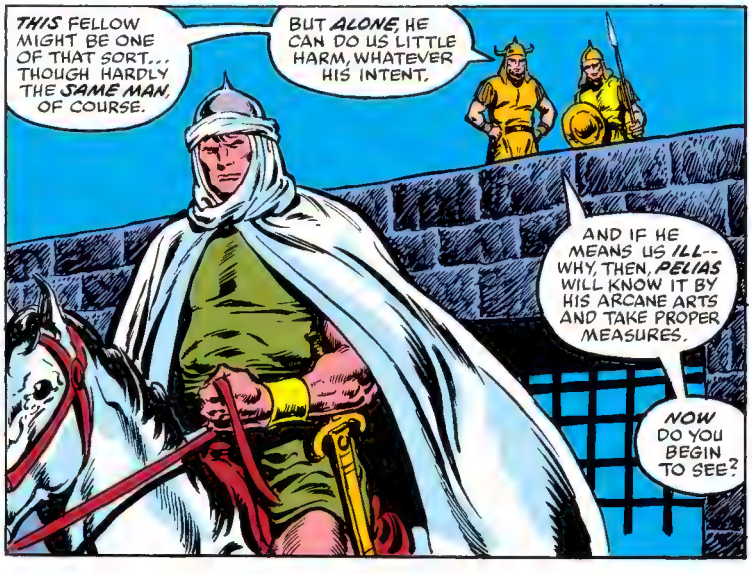

THEN, EVEN AS THE SUN GLOWS ITS LAST...
LET ME IN, GATESMAN!
WHAT SEEK YOU HERE, ROGUE?
WE LET NO OUTLANDERS IN AT NIGHT, TO CUT OUR THROATS!

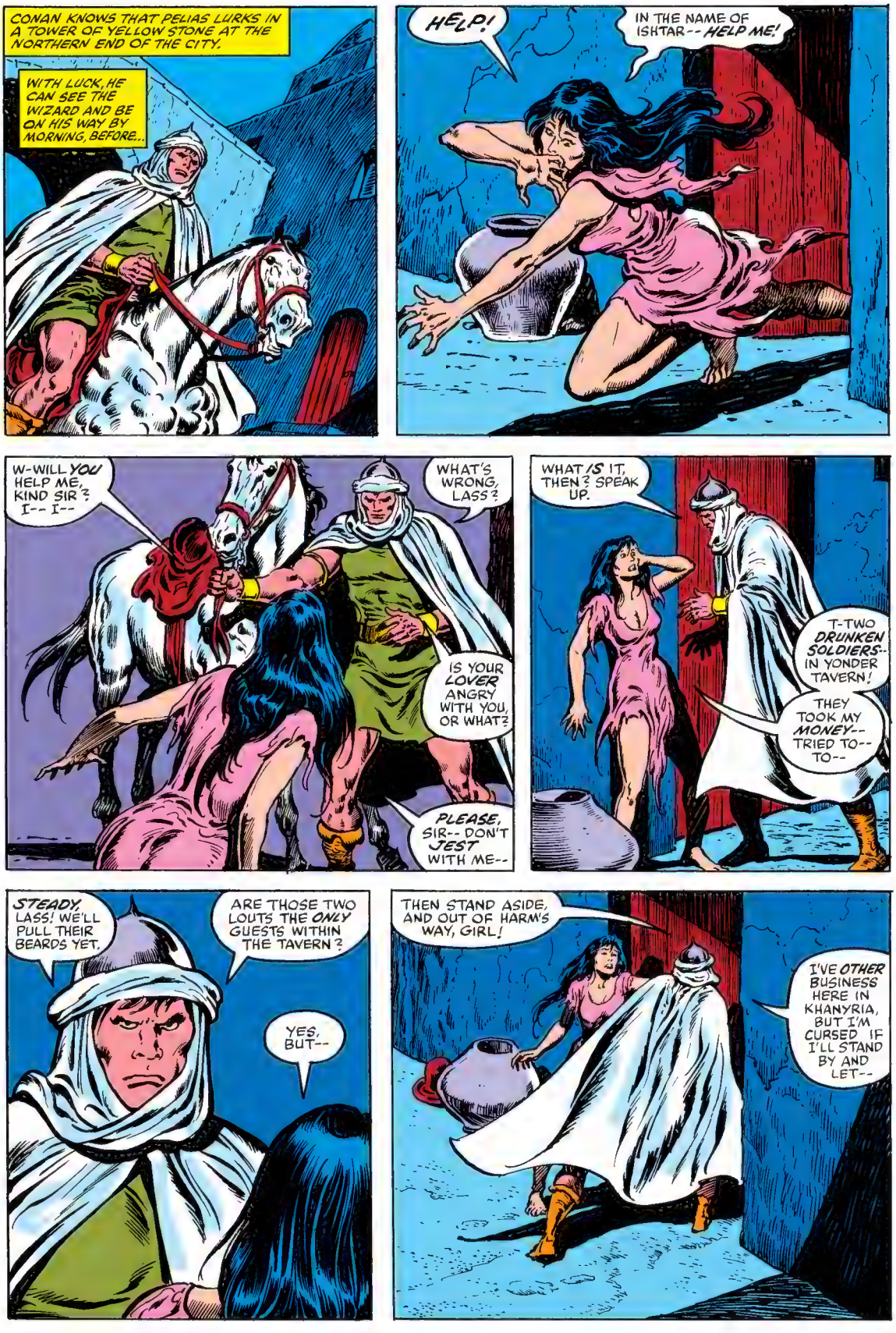
MY FRIEND...FOR WORDS LESS THAN THOSE, I HAVE SLIT A HUNDRED GULLETS.
LET ME IN--OR BY CROM, I'LL RAISE A HORDE TO SACK THIS BUNCH OF HOVELS!

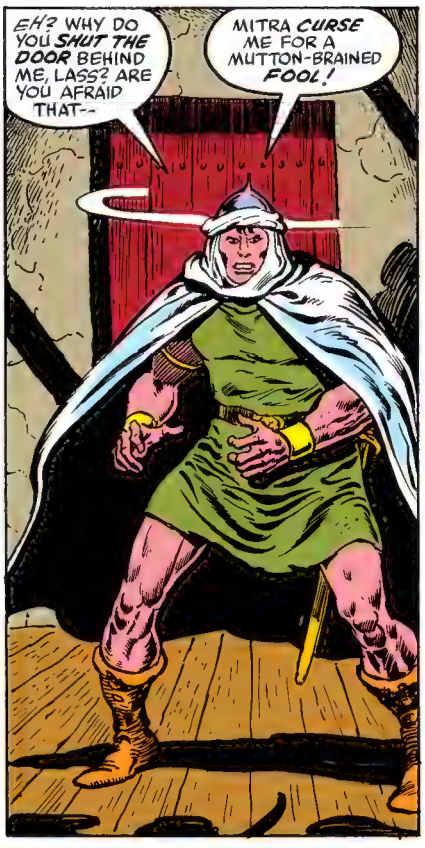
NO NEED FOR ANGER, HORSEMAN; THIS GUARD IS NEW.
WHAT IS YOUR BUSINESS IN OUR CITY?
CALL ME ARUS--AND I SEEK PELIAS, THE SORCERER.
YOU MAY ENTER!


MOMENTS LATER, THE NEWCOMER CANTERS THROUGH...
...NOT DEIGNING EVEN TO GLANCE AT THOSE AROUND THE GATE.

WHY DID YOU LET HIM IN, CAPTAIN CRASSIDES? HE'S A NORTHERN BARBARIAN, FROM HIS LOOK AND ACCENT!
LIKE ANOTHER I HEARD OF SOME YEARS AGO...
...WHO ONCE LED A BAND OF OUTLAW ZUAGIRS* AGAINST THE SHEMITE CITY-STATES SOUTH OF HERE.
*FIERCE DESERT NOMADS.--R.T.

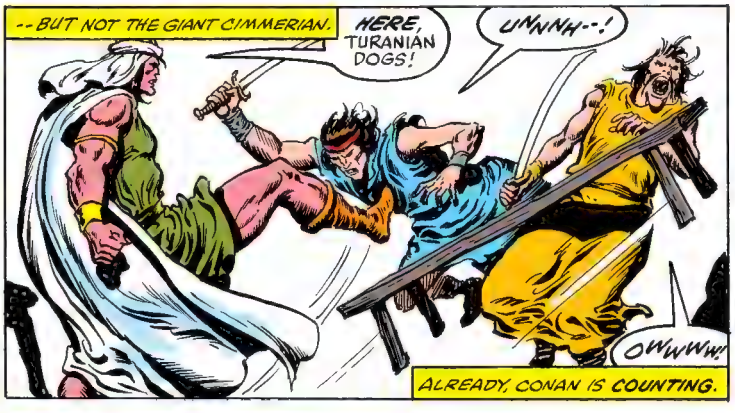

THIS FELLOW MIGHT BE ONE OF THAT SORT... THOUGH HARDLY THE SAME MAN, OF COURSE.
BUT ALONE, HE CAN DO US LITTLE HARM, WHATEVER HIS INTENT.
AND IF HE MEANS US ILL--WHY, THEN, PELIAS WILL KNOW IT BY HIS ARCANE ARTS AND TAKE PROPER MEASURES.
NOW DO YOU BEGIN TO SEE?

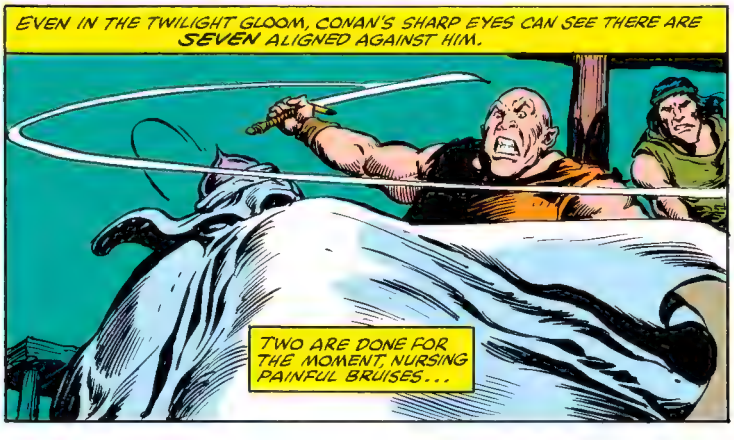

CONAN KNOWS THAT PELIAS LURKS IN A TOWER OF YELLOW STONE AT THE NORTHERN END OF THE CITY.
WITH LUCK, HE CAN SEE THE WIZARD AND BE ON HIS WAY BY MORNING, BEFORE...
HELP!
IN THE NAME OF ISHTAR-- HELP ME!
W-WILL YOU HELP ME, KIND SIR? I-- I--
WHAT'S WRONG, LASS?
IS YOUR LOVER ANGRY WITH YOU, OR WHAT?
PLEASE, SIR-- DON'T JEST WITH ME--
WHAT IS IT, THEN? SPEAK UP.
T-TWO DRUNKEN SOLDIERS-- IN YONDER TAVERN!
THEY TOOK MY MONEY-- TRIED TO-- TO--
STEADY, LASS! WE'LL PULL THEIR BEARDS YET.
ARE THOSE TWO LOUTS THE ONLY GUESTS WITHIN THE TAVERN?
YES, BUT--
THEN STAND ASIDE, AND OUT OF HARM'S WAY, GIRL!
I'VE OTHER BUSINESS HERE IN KHANYRIA, BUT I'M CURSED IF I'LL STAND BY AND LET--

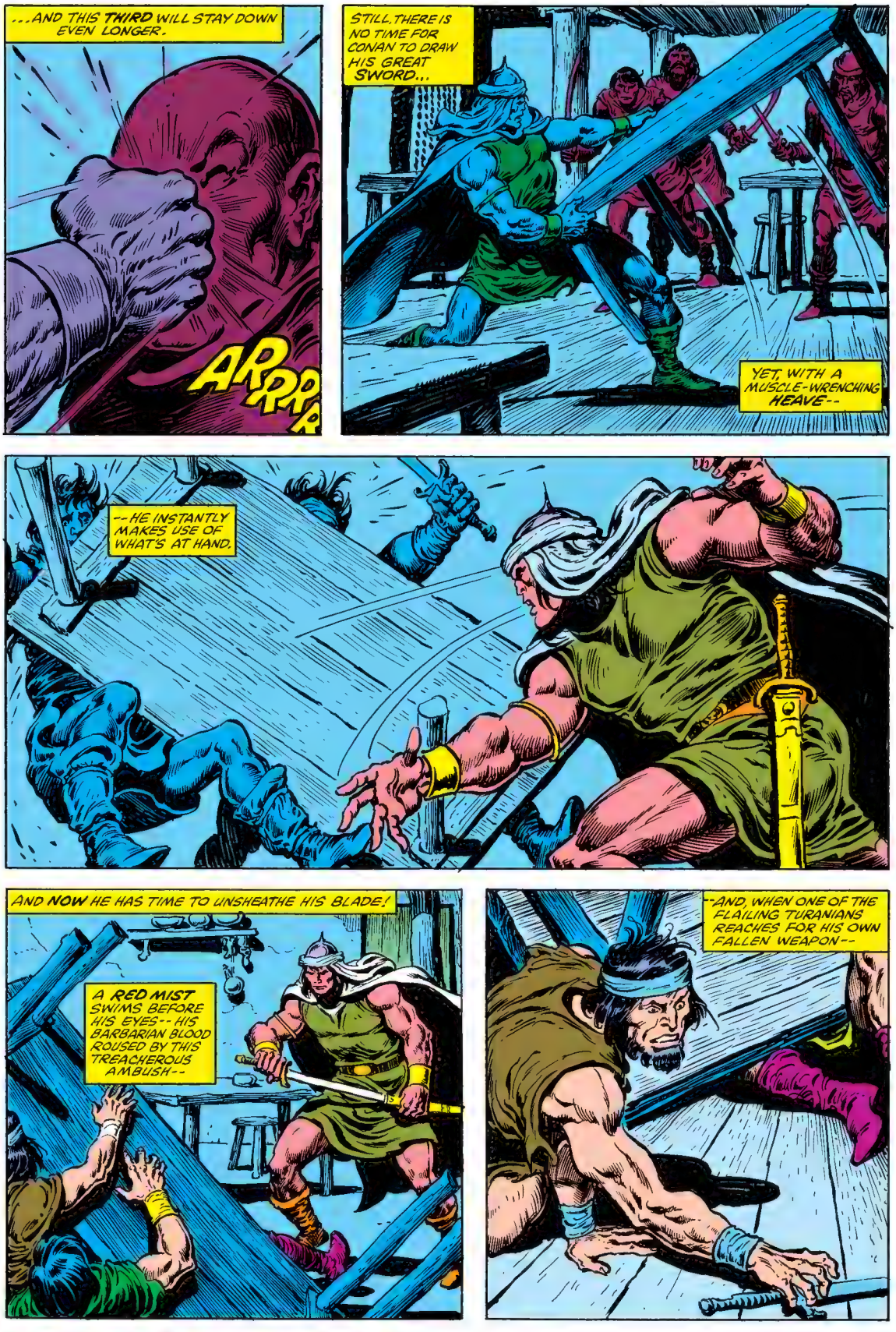

EH? WHY DO YOU SHUT THE DOOR BEHIND ME, LASS? ARE YOU AFRAID THAT--
MITRA CURSE ME FOR A MUTTON-BRAINED FOOL!

A TRAP!
A CIVILIZED MAN WOULD BE STUNNED BY SURPRISE ONE SECOND AT SUCH A SIGHT--

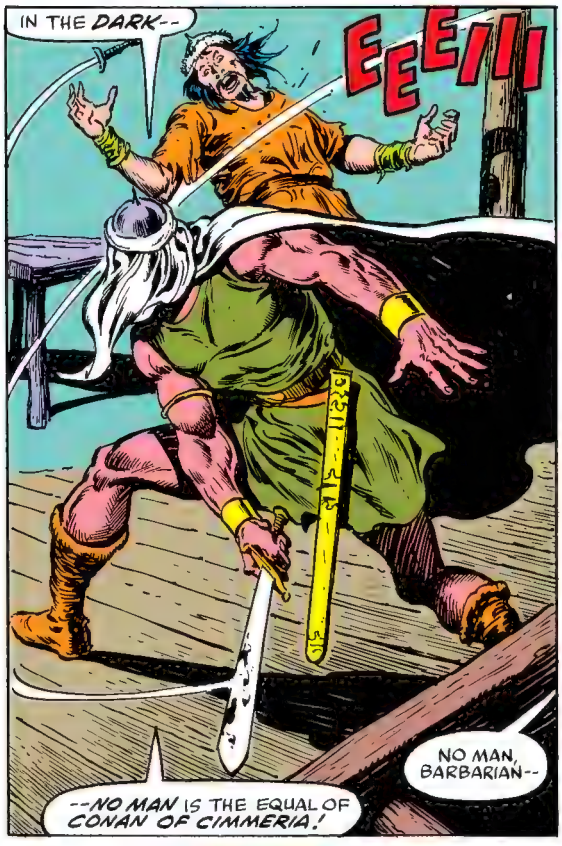
--THEN CUT DOWN THE NEXT, AS ARMED MEN RUSHED SWIFTLY UPON HIM--
SLAY HIM!


--BUT NOT THE GIANT CIMMERIAN.
HERE, TURANIAN DOGS!
UNNNH--!
OWWWW!
ALREADY, CONAN IS COUNTING.

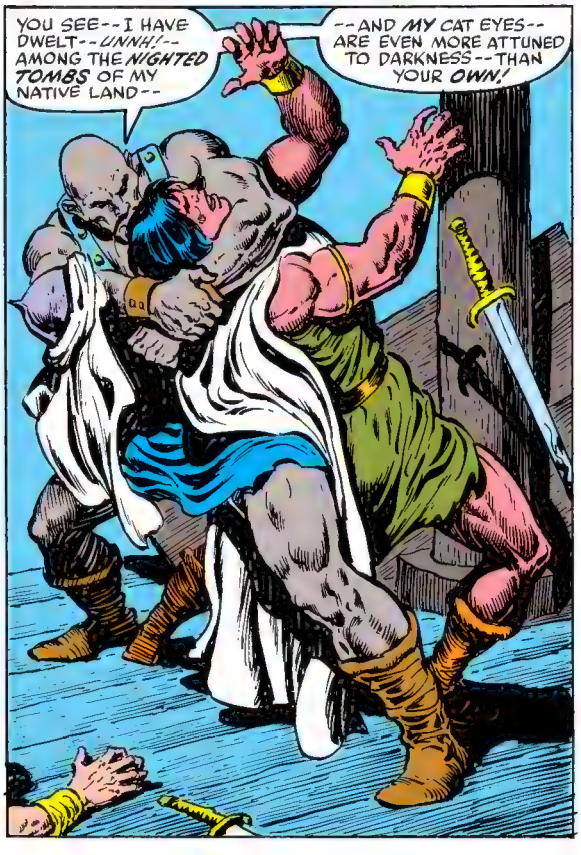

EVEN IN THE TWILIGHT GLOOM, CONAN'S SHARP EYES CAN SEE THERE ARE SEVEN ALIGNED AGAINST HIM.
TWO ARE DONE FOR THE MOMENT, NURSING PAINFUL BRUISES...


...AND THIS THIRD WILL STAY DOWN EVEN LONGER.
ARRRR
STILL, THERE IS NO TIME FOR CONAN TO DRAW HIS GREAT SWORD...
YET, WITH A MUSCLE-WRENCHING HEAVE--
--HE INSTANTLY MAKES USE OF WHAT'S AT HAND.
AND NOW HE HAS TIME TO UNSHEATHE HIS BLADE!
A RED MIST SWIMS BEFORE HIS EYES-- HIS BARBARIAN BLOOD ROUSED BY THIS TREACHEROUS AMBUSH--
--AND, WHEN ONE OF THE FLAILING TURANIANS REACHES FOR HIS OWN FALLEN WEAPON--

--CONAN GIVES HIM CRUSHED RIBS TO NURSE FOR THE NEXT SIXMONTH.
YOWWWRR
THAT LEAVES BUT THREE IN FIGHTING CONDITION, HE MUSES...
AAAAAA
...NO, TWO!
THEN, AT LAST, WORDS FROM OTHER LIPS THAN CONAN'S OWN...
I SWORE THIS DAY WOULD COME, YOU LOW-BORN DOG!
I KNOW THAT VOICE, BY THE GODS!
BARACCUS! BUT YOU'RE AN AQUILONIAN BORN, THOUGH YOU NOW WEAR THE LIVERY OF A TURANIAN!
AYE! YOU EXILED ME, LONG MONTHS AGO, FOR PLOTTING WITH THE OPHIREANS AGAINST YOU.
NOW, I'LL EVEN THAT SCORE!
YOU SHOULD HAVE ATTACKED ME IN BROAD DAYLIGHT, TRAITOROUS FOOL...


IN THE DARK--
EEEIII
NO MAN, BARBARIAN--
--NO MAN IS THE EQUAL OF CONAN OF CIMMERIA!

--BUT MENFA OF LUXUR, BY SET!
NNNFF!


YOU SEE--I HAVE DWELT--UNNH!--AMONG THE NIGHTED TOMBS OF MY NATIVE LAND--
--AND MY CAT EYES--ARE EVEN MORE ATTUNED TO DARKNESS--THAN YOUR OWN!

I--REMEMBER YOU--FROM THE HORDES--OF PRINCE KATUMUN--UGNNH!--
THEN LET ME--BE THE FACE YOU SEE BEFORE YOU--TO GUIDE YOU INTO THE LAND OF SHADES!
IF IT--IS, STYGIAN--

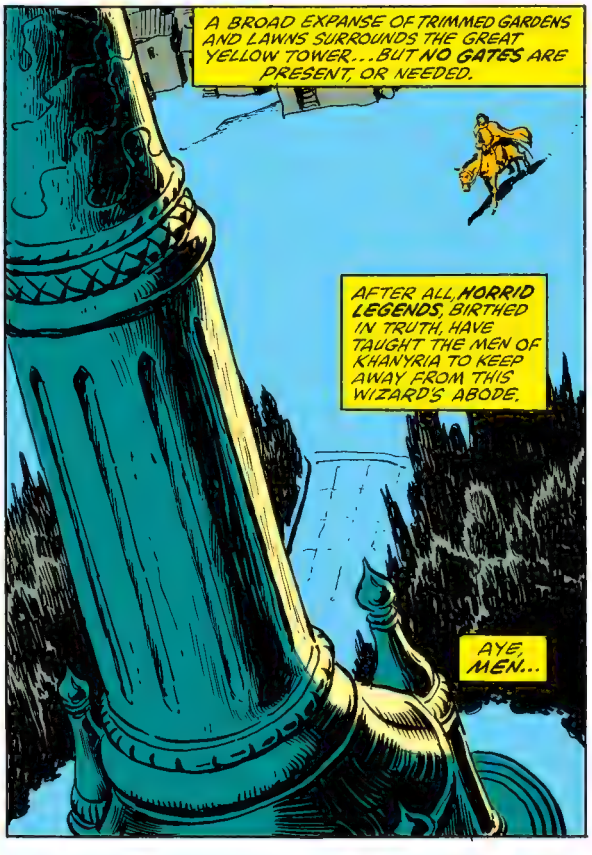
--IT WILL BE BECAUSE YOU ARE THERE FOR MANY YEARS--
--BEFORE ME!
OOOFF!
NOW, YOU SCHEMING DEVIL--
--THE TABLES ARE TURNED!
TELL ME WHO--MMMFF!--SENT YOU AFTER ME, OR I'LL--
BUT THE GREAT-MUSCLED STYGIAN FIGHTS BACK DESPERATELY--AND CONAN KNOWS IT IS KILL OR BE KILLED.
AND WHEN THAT IS THE CHOICE...FOR THE CIMMERIAN, IT IS NO CHOICE AT ALL.
MURDEROUS JACKAL!
BUT MENFA OF LUXUR CAN NO LONGER HEAR.
INDEED, SEVERAL ARE DEAD, THE OTHERS FLED, WHEN ABRUPTLY--
OH, MERCY!--
--WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO MY FINE HOUSE?
BLOOD ALL OVER--FURNITURE RUINED--!
YOU HAD A HAND IN THIS, YOU YAPPING DOG!
THEY COULDN'T HAVE SET THIS AMBUSH WITHOUT YOUR HELP!
M-MERCY, MILORD! THEY TH-THREATENED TO CUT MY THROAT OTHERWISE--I SWEAR THEY DID--!

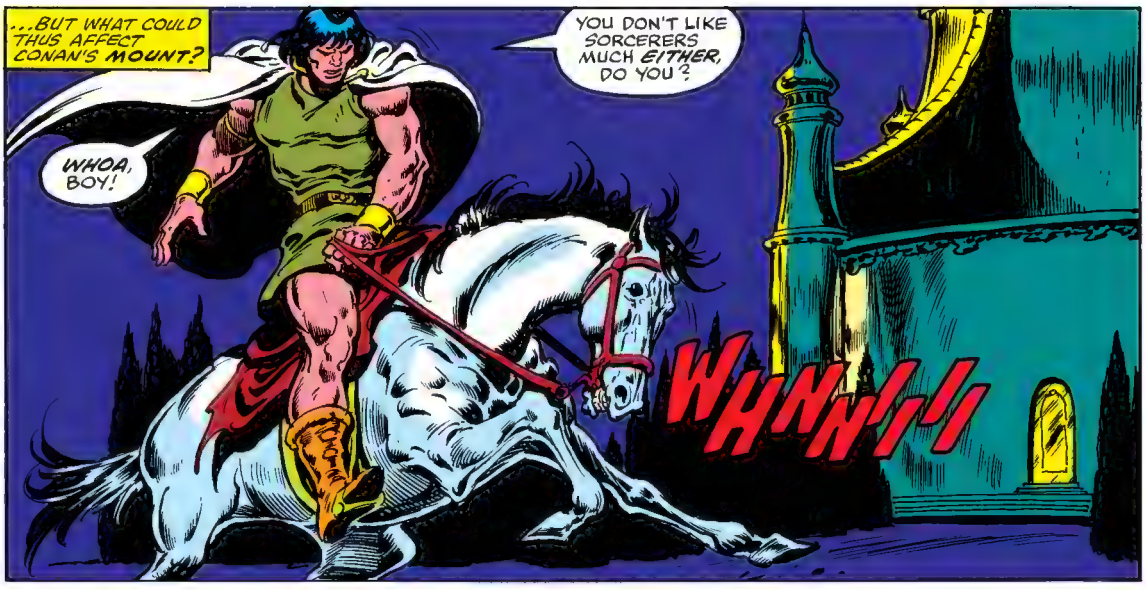
ENOUGH! BE GLAD I DON'T FLAY YOU ALIVE!
NOW, FETCH SOME FOOD AND DRINK--ALSO SOME CLEAN CLOTHS TO BIND UP THESE SCRATCHES!
YES--YES, MILORD!
...KILLING DRIES A MAN'S THROATS, BY CROM.
NOW, TELL ME,--WHERE'S THE GIRL WHO WAS HERE WITH THESE MEN BEFORE I ENTERED?
MILORD, AGAIN I SWEAR TO YOU--
--I NEVER SAW HER UNTIL SHE CAME HERE YESTERDAY, DRESSED IN OUTLANDISH GARMENTS. SHE--
LEAD ME TO HER ROOM--AT ONCE!
AND, SHOULD THIS PROVE ANOTHER TRAP--!
IT WON'T, MILORD--I SWEAR IT.
YOU SWEAR TOO MUCH, TAVERNER. JUST SHOW ME HER ROOM!
YES...
HERE IT IS, GOOD SIR.
OPEN THE DOOR WIDE--SO I CAN SEE CLEARLY BEFORE I ENTER!
GOOD! THE ROOM'S TOO SMALL FOR A SECOND AMBUSH.
THE GIRL CHANGED HER GARB IN THIS ROOM, MILORD, AS YOU CAN PLAINLY SEE.
AS ISHTAR IS MY WITNESS, I KNOW NOTHING ELSE ABOUT HER!
EASY, MAN. I BELIEVE YOU. NOW GO!
BUT, AS CONAN LOOKS AT THE GLEAMING SILKS...A TURBAN STRIP WITH AN EMERALD PIN...A FILMY VEIL...HE STANDS SILENT WITH STARTLED RECOGNITION.
THIS IS THE GARB OF A TURANIAN NOBLEWOMAN... FROM THE GREAT EASTERN EMPIRE OF KING YEZDIGERD!

AS HE RIDES FORTH, SOON AFTERWARD, ONLY A LITTLE STIFFENED BY WOUNDS WHICH WOULD FELL AN ORDINARY MAN FOR DAYS, CONAN IS PUZZLED.
HE KNOWS WELL THAT MANY MEN OF DIFFERENT CREEDS, RACES, AND STATION LUST FOR HIS BLOOD.
ONLY TROCERO AND PROSPERO KNEW OF HIS MISSION AND DESTINATION. HOWEVER... AND THEIR LOYALTY IS BEYOND QUESTION.

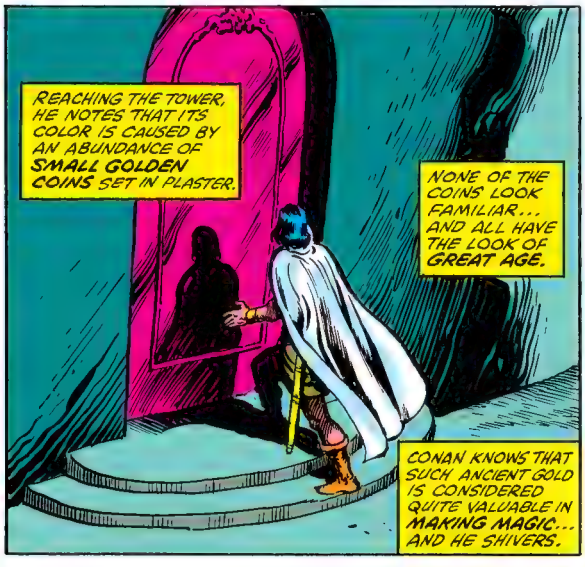
STILL, SOMETHING OR SOMEONE BROUGHT BARACCUS FROM THE WEST AND THE TURANIAN WOMAN FROM THE EAST TOGETHER TO TRY TO SLAY HIM.

BUT NOW, EMERGING UPON A WIDE, DESERTED SQUARE, HE SPIES THE OUTLINE OF A SPIRED EDIFICE, POINTING LIKE A GOLDEN ARROW AIMED AT HEAVEN'S HEART...
THE TOWER WHERE PELIAS SECRETS HIMSELF FROM THE UNDESIRED COMPANY OF HIS FELLOW MAN!


A BROAD EXPANSE OF TRIMMED GARDENS AND LAWNS SURROUNDS THE GREAT YELLOW TOWER... BUT NO GATES ARE PRESENT, OR NEEDED.
AFTER ALL, HORRID LEGENDS, BIRTHED IN TRUTH, HAVE TAUGHT THE MEN OF KHANYRIA TO KEEP AWAY FROM THIS WIZARD'S ABODE.
AYE, MEN...


...BUT WHAT COULD THUS AFFECT CONAN'S MOUNT?
WHOA, BOY!
YOU DON'T LIKE SORCERERS MUCH EITHER, DO YOU?
WHNN!!!

CAN'T SAY I BLAME YOU MUCH.
PERHAPS, HE MUSES AS HE STALKS TOWARD THE TOWER, PELIAS HAS UNHOLY COMPANY THIS NIGHT...
FOR, NECROMANTIC RITES OFTEN DRAW NAMELESS MONSTROSITIES TO THEM, AS THE SMELL OF CARRION ATTRACTS VULTURES.
THE CIMMERIAN HAS MET HIS SHARE OF SUCH.

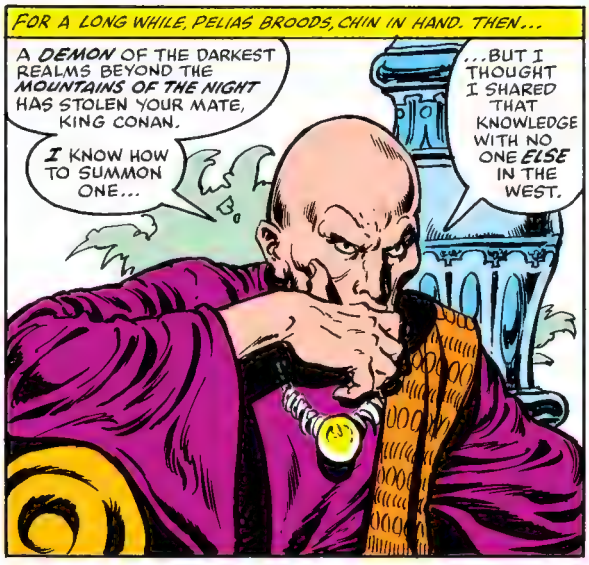

REACHING THE TOWER, HE NOTES THAT ITS COLOR IS CAUSED BY AN ABUNDANCE OF SMALL GOLDEN COINS SET IN PLASTER.
NONE OF THE COINS LOOK FAMILIAR... AND ALL HAVE THE LOOK OF GREAT AGE.
CONAN KNOWS THAT SUCH ANCIENT GOLD IS CONSIDERED QUITE VALUABLE IN MAKING MAGIC... AND HE SHIVERS.

ALL THE SAME, HE TRIES THE IRON DOOR...
...WHICH SWINGS SILENTLY INWARD.

BY THE FAINT LIGHT COMING THROUGH THE OPEN DOOR, CONAN CAN SEE ONE FLIGHT OF STAIRS CIRCLING UPWARD, TOWARD THE TOP OF THE TOWER.
ANOTHER, NEAR AT HAND, LOSES ITSELF IN UNDERGROUND DARKNESS... AND MUSKY ODORS WAFT UP FROM A MAZE OF CAVERNS BENEATH THE TOWER.
THE CIMMERIAN IS RECALLING SIMILAR ODORS IN THE HAUNTED CATACOMBS OF THE DEAD CITY OF PTEION, IN STYGIA, WHEN SUDDENLY--
WELCOME, CONAN! MOUNT THE STAIRS LEADING UPWARD-- AND FOLLOW THE LIGHT.
PELIAS? WHERE ARE YOU, MAN-- IF IT'S YOU?
AND WHAT LIGHT ARE YOU--?
MACHA AND NEMAIN!
WITHOUT WARNING, A SWIRL OF LIGHT APPEARS BEFORE HIS VERY EYES...
...SWIFTLY FORMING ITSELF INTO A GLOWING BALL.
PELIAS-- I LIKE NOT THIS KIND OF MUMMERY, AS YOU KNOW WELL!
PELIAS...?

AS THE FLOATING, SHIMMERING GLOBE OF LIGHT MOVES SLOWLY UP THE UNCREAKING STAIRS, CONAN FOLLOWS IT WITHOUT HESITATION.
AND IF SOME PHANTOM FEAR GNAWS INWARDLY AT HIS HEART... WHY, HE STILL HIDES IT FAR BETTER THAN MOST.
THEN, AT STAIRS' END, A RUNE-CARVED DOOR OPENS SILENTLY...
AND, AS CONAN STEPS THROUGH IT, SENSES FINE-WHETTED LIKE THOSE OF A PROWLING LEOPARD...
...THE LIGHT SIMPLY... VANISHES.
OR, RATHER... SOMEONE HAS TAKEN ITS PLACE.
AH, WELCOME, CONAN!
HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN? FOUR YEARS? FIVE?
FOUR AND A HALF, PELIAS.

BUT, I SEE YOU ARE WOUNDED...AND LATELY, TOO.
DRINK THIS, MY FRIEND. IT IS MADE FROM THE SECRET HERBS OF THE MISTY ISLES AND OF THE LANDS BEYOND KUSH.
IT WILL HEAL YOUR WOUNDS, AND EASE YOUR TIRED MUSCLES.
HUHN! MY VEINS--THEY SEEM AFIRE--!
ONLY FOR A MOMENT, YOU SEE?
YES! ALREADY A VAST WEARINESS SEEMS LIFTED FROM MY SHOULDERS.
TRULY, PELIAS, THIS IS A MAGICAL BREW!
YES, IT IS RATHER POTENT...A COMPENDIUM OF RARE INGREDIENTS AND POWERFUL INCANTATIONS.
I WISH I'D POSSESSED IT MANY A FORMER TIME IN MY LIFE!
STILL, YOU DID NOT RIDE SO MANY LEAGUES FROM THE ROYAL PALACE OF AQUILONIA SIMPLY TO PARTAKE OF MY HOSPITALITY.
WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE, BOTH ALONE AND IN HASTE?
I'VE NOT HEARD OF ANY GREAT WARS IN THE NORTHWEST, IN WHICH YOU MIGHT NEED MY AID.
IF IT WERE ONLY A STRAIGHTFORWARD WAR, I WOULD NEVER ASK MAGICAL HELP.
BUT I FIND MYSELF PITTED AGAINST DARK AND UNKNOWN POWERS, PELIAS...
I NEED CLUES TO LEAD ME TO WHERE I CAN SMITE MY FOE--
--AYE, AND RESCUE MY QUEEN--THE WOMAN I LOVE!
IN SHORT SWIFT SENTENCES, CONAN TELLS THE WIZARD OF THE RECENT FATEFUL NIGHT IN TARANTIA...

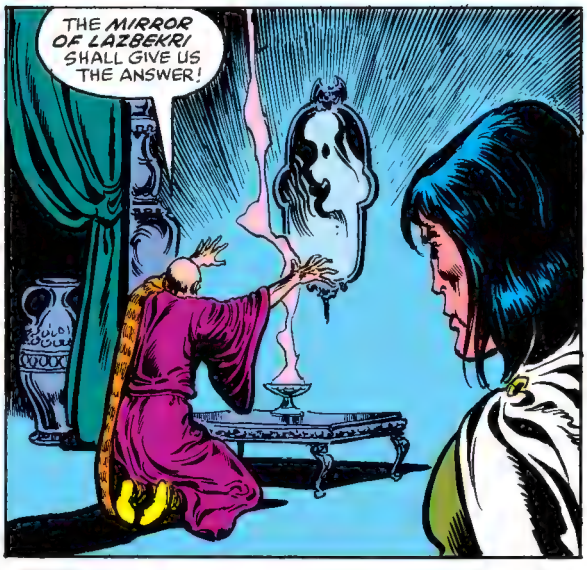

FOR A LONG WHILE, PELIAS BROODS, CHIN IN HAND. THEN...
A DEMON OF THE DARKEST REALMS BEYOND THE MOUNTAINS OF THE NIGHT HAS STOLEN YOUR MATE, KING CONAN.
I KNOW HOW TO SUMMON ONE...
...BUT I THOUGHT I SHARED THAT KNOWLEDGE WITH NO ONE ELSE IN THE WEST.

THEN FETCH THIS FIEND YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT-- AND WE'LL WRING THE TRUTH OUT OF HIM, DEVIL OR NO!
NOT SO FAST, MY HOT-HEADED FRIEND!
DO NOT RUSH HEAD-LONG INTO UNKNOWN DANGERS.

IT IS CLEAR THIS DEMON HAS BEEN SUMMONED BY A SORCERER WITH POWERS SUPERIOR TO THOSE OF ORDINARY MAGICIANS.
SHOULD WE DRAG THE FIEND HITHER, WE SHOULD HAVE BOTH HIM AND HIS MASTER TO COPE WITH...

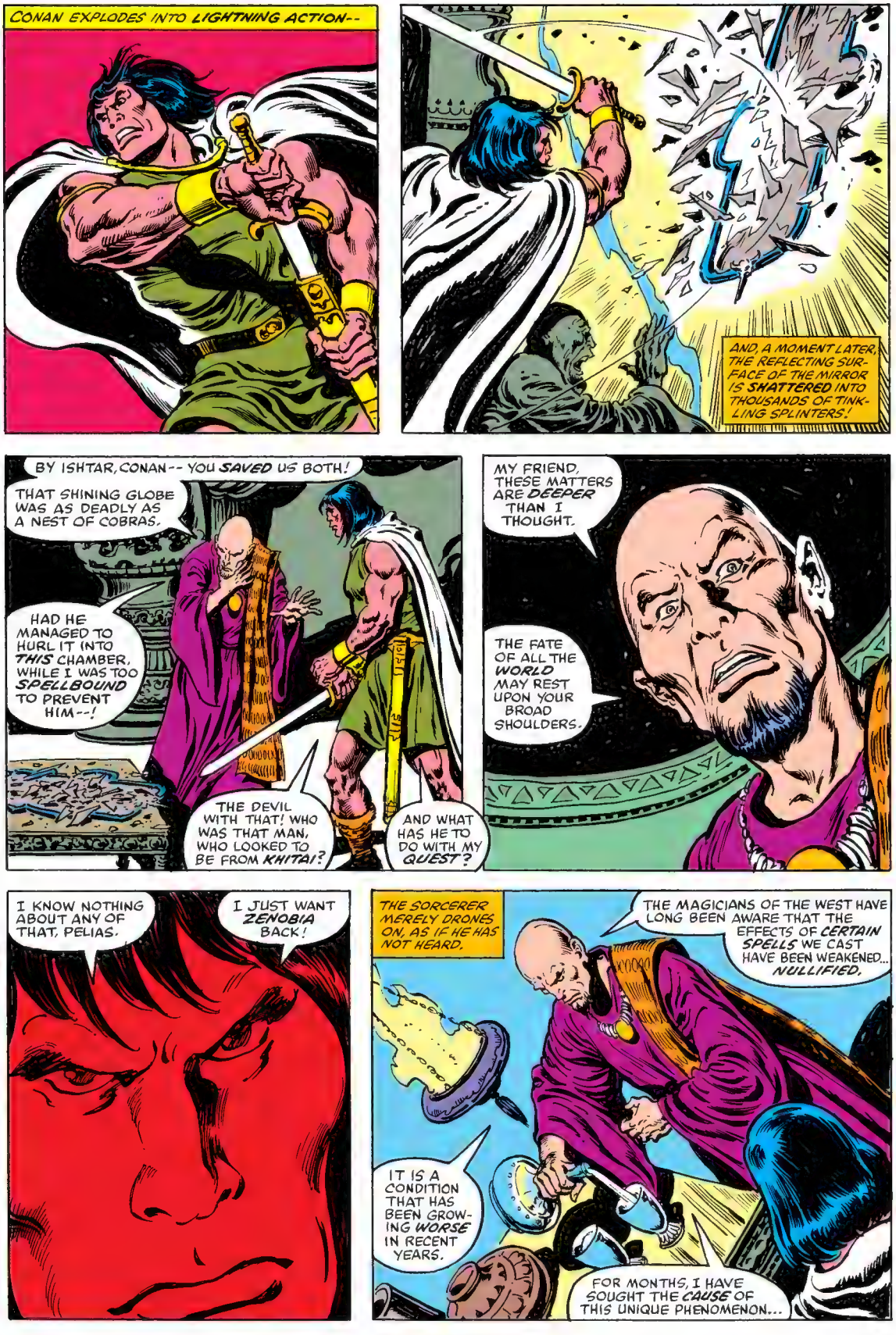
AND THAT MIGHT BE TOO MUCH EVEN FOR US.

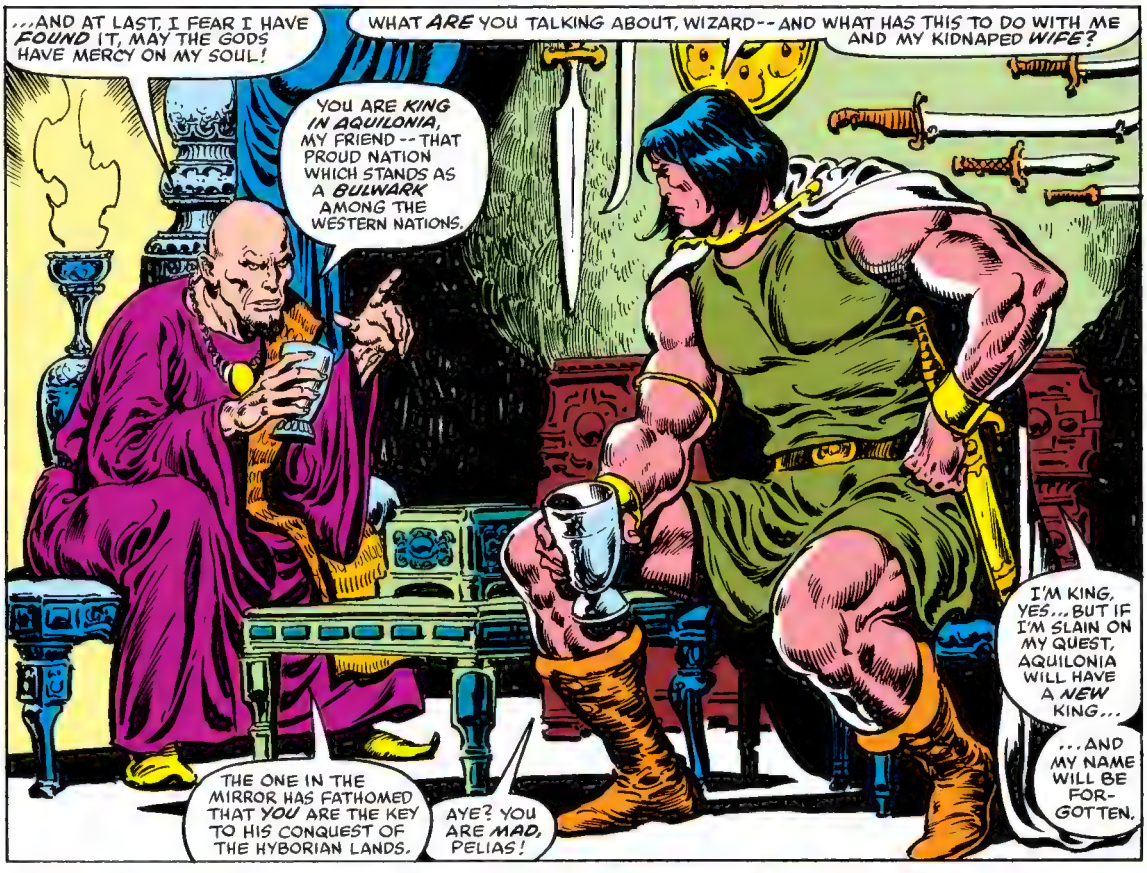
NO... I KNOW A BETTER WAY.


THE MIRROR OF LAZBEKRI SHALL GIVE US THE ANSWER!

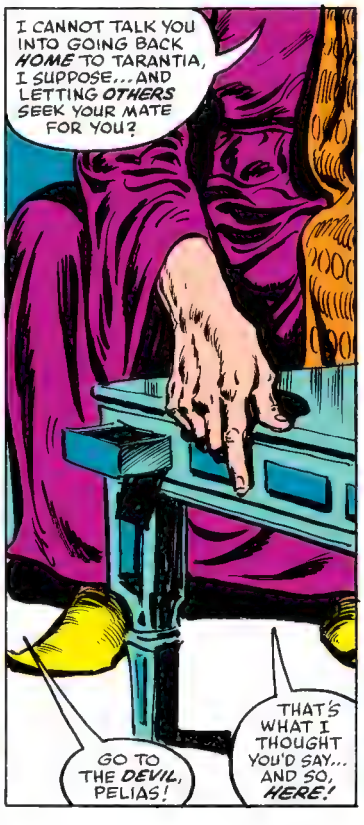
DESPITE THE WIZARD'S CRYPTIC GESTURES AND THE BILLOWING BLUE SMOKE, IT SEEMS AS IF NOTHING HAPPENS FOR AN AGE... AN ETERNITY...
THE SORCERER'S DEFENSES ARE STRONG, CONAN; I CANNOT PIERCE THEM.
THAT WOULD BE CROM, THE GRIM GOD OF THE CIMMERIANS... THOUGH I'VE HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH GODS FOR MANY YEARS.
WHO IS YOUR TUTELARY DEITY?
I LEAVE THEM ALONE... AND THEY LEAVE ME ALONE.
WELL, PRAY TO YOUR CROM FOR HELP.
WE NEED IT.
CONAN CLOSES HIS EYES AND, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN DECADES... HE PRAYS.
O FATHER CROM, WHO BREATHES POWER TO STRIVE AND SLAY INTO A MAN'S SOUL AT BIRTH... HELP YOUR SON AGAINST THE DEMON THAT HAS STOLEN HIS MATE...!
AND IN HIS BRAIN, HE SEEMS TO HEAR... A VOICE...
...A VOICE WHICH SAYS: "LONG HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME, O CONAN... BUT YOU ARE MY TRUE SON FOR ALL THAT, IN YOUR STRIVING AND ENDURING AND CONQUERING, BEHOLD!"
AND, OPENING HIS EYES, CONAN NOTICES FOR THE FIRST TIME THAT THE NEARBY MIRROR SHOWS NO REFLECTION, EITHER OF PELIAS OR OF ANYTHING ELSE.
IN A LOW MONOTONE, THE OLD WIZARD CHANTS AN INCANTATION...
OMBOS SUTEKH NUBT... URT-HIKEU KAMEPHIS... KHEPRI HARMAKHIS... OMBOS SUTEKH NUBT...
...AND THE CIMMERIAN REGOGNIZES THE TONGUE AS THE LANGUAGE USED BY THE PRIESTS OF STYGIA IN THEIR CLANDESTINE RITUALS IN DARK-WALLED KHEMI!

THEN, SLOWLY, AN IMAGE FORMS IN THE GREY MIRROR.
AT FIRST, IT IS BLURRED... UNCERTAIN...
THEN, WITH ABRUPT SWIFTNESS, IT CLEARS, SHARPENS -- INTO A COWLED AND ROBED FIGURE, SEATED AT A LOW TABLE, A SCROLL IN HIS HANDS.
NEXT INSTANT, THE FIGURE THROWS UP ITS HEAD TO LOOK FULL IN THEIR FACES --
--AND THIN, COLORLESS LIPS PART IN A GHASTLY GRIN!
PELIAS-- WHAT THE DEVIL--?
BUT THE KOTHIAN WIZARD DOES NOT RESPOND...
...AS, FROM THE FOLDS OF HIS ROBE, THE GOLD-SKINNED ONE BRINGS FORTH A SHINING, GLIMMERING BALL.
HIS OBLIQUE EYES GAZING COLDLY INTO THEIRS, HE RAISES HIS HAND TO THROW IT--


CONAN EXPLODES INTO LIGHTNING ACTION--
AND, A MOMENT LATER, THE REFLECTING SURFACE OF THE MIRROR IS SHATTERED INTO THOUSANDS OF TINKLING SPLINTERS!
BY ISHTAR, CONAN-- YOU SAVED US BOTH!
THAT SHINING GLOBE WAS AS DEADLY AS A NEST OF COBRAS.
HAD HE MANAGED TO HURL IT INTO THIS CHAMBER, WHILE I WAS TOO SPELLBOUND TO PREVENT HIM--!
THE DEVIL WITH THAT! WHO WAS THAT MAN, WHO LOOKED TO BE FROM KHITAI?
AND WHAT HAS HE TO DO WITH MY QUEST?
MY FRIEND, THESE MATTERS ARE DEEPER THAN I THOUGHT.
THE FATE OF ALL THE WORLD MAY REST UPON YOUR BROAD SHOULDERS.
I KNOW NOTHING ABOUT ANY OF THAT, PELIAS.
I JUST WANT ZENOBIA BACK!
THE SORCERER MERELY DRONES ON, AS IF HE HAS NOT HEARD.
THE MAGICIANS OF THE WEST HAVE LONG BEEN AWARE THAT THE EFFECTS OF CERTAIN SPELLS WE CAST HAVE BEEN WEAKENED... NULLIFIED.
IT IS A CONDITION THAT HAS BEEN GROWING WORSE IN RECENT YEARS.
FOR MONTHS, I HAVE SOUGHT THE CAUSE OF THIS UNIQUE PHENOMENON...

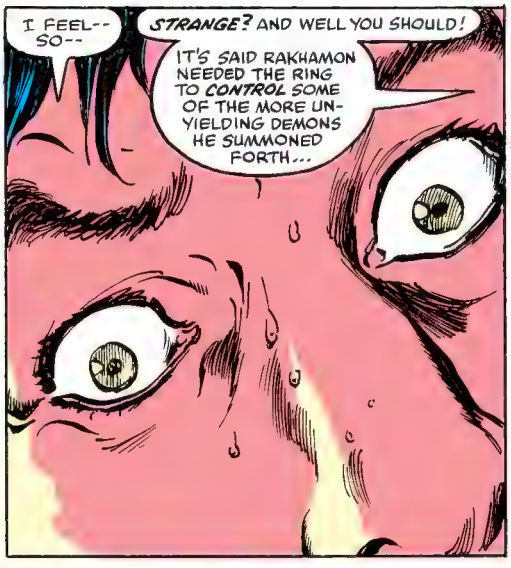

...AND AT LAST, I FEAR I HAVE FOUND IT, MAY THE GODS HAVE MERCY ON MY SOUL!
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, WIZARD--AND WHAT HAS THIS TO DO WITH ME AND MY KIDNAPED WIFE?
YOU ARE KING IN AQUILONIA, MY FRIEND--THAT PROUD NATION WHICH STANDS AS A BULWARK AMONG THE WESTERN NATIONS.
I'M KING, YES...BUT IF I'M SLAIN ON MY QUEST, AQUILONIA WILL HAVE A NEW KING...
...AND MY NAME WILL BE FORGOTTEN.
THE ONE IN THE MIRROR HAS FATHOMED THAT YOU ARE THE KEY TO HIS CONQUEST OF THE HYBORIAN LANDS.
AYE? YOU ARE MAD, PELIAS!

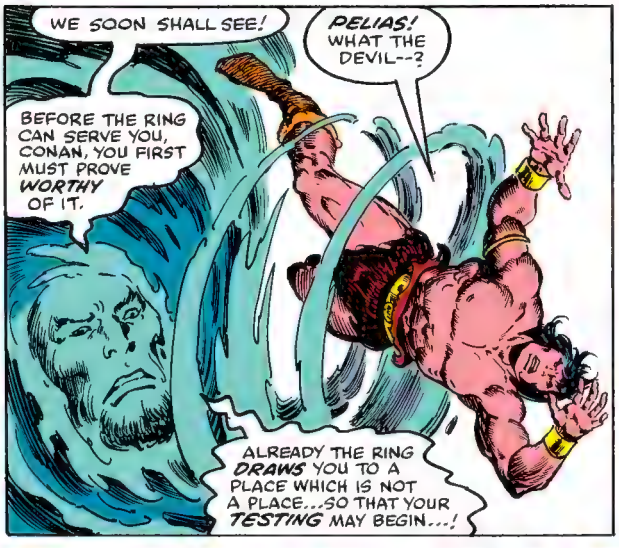
NAY, CIMMERIAN! YOU HAVE LONG BEEN THE CENTER OF MIGHTY HAPPENINGS--AND THE GODS LOOK FAVORABLY UPON YOU.
BY REJUVENATING AQUILONIA, YOU HAVE FRAYED THE FAR-FLUNG WEB OF INTRIGUE AND EVIL SPUN BY THE SORCEROUS FORCES OF THE DISTANT EAST.
THAT'S WHY HE CONJURED UP A DEMON TO CAPTURE YOUR QUEEN.
HE? YOU MEAN--?
THE ONE IN THE MIRROR, YES!
HE IS CERTAIN YOU WILL BE SLAIN BY FOES ALONG THE WAY, AS YOU RIDE TO RESCUE HER.


I CANNOT TALK YOU INTO GOING BACK HOME TO TARANTIA, I SUPPOSE...AND LETTING OTHERS SEEK YOUR MATE FOR YOU?
GO TO THE DEVIL, PELIAS!
THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT YOU'D SAY... AND SO, HERE!

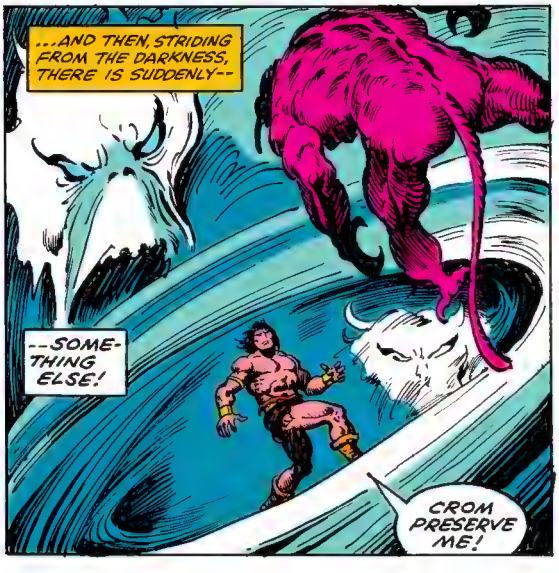
MANY MOONS HAVE PASSED SINCE I WON THIS RING, FROM A POWERFUL SORCERER OF LUXUR.
THROUGH EONS OF BLACK TIME I STROVE WITH HIM--BUT THOSE WERE THE DAYS WHEN I WAS YOUNG, AND GLORIED IN MY POWERS!
NOW, MY FRIEND, I WANT YOU TO WEAR THIS RING ON YOUR JOURNEY--
THE RING OF RAKHAMON!

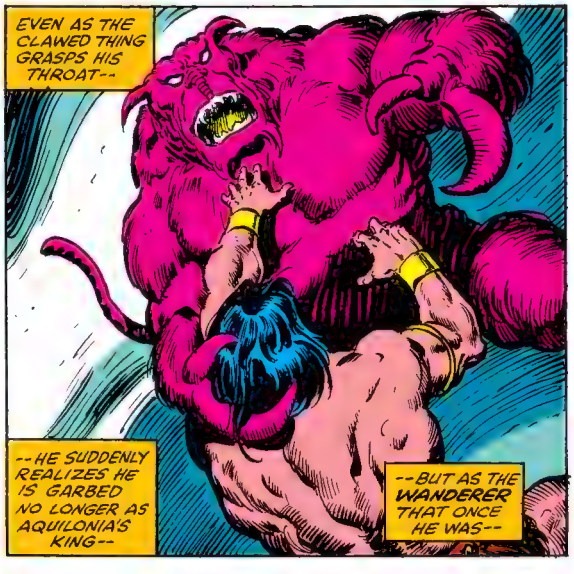
YOU HAVE HEARD OF RAKHAMON, OF COURSE?
WHO HAS NOT HEARD OF THAT DREAD SORCERER, THOUGH HE PERISHED A CENTURY AND A HALF AGO?
HE FASHIONED THIS RING, IT'S SAID, OF A FALLEN STAR HE FOUND IN THE FROZEN NORTH.
AYE. THAT'S IT. PUT IT ON.

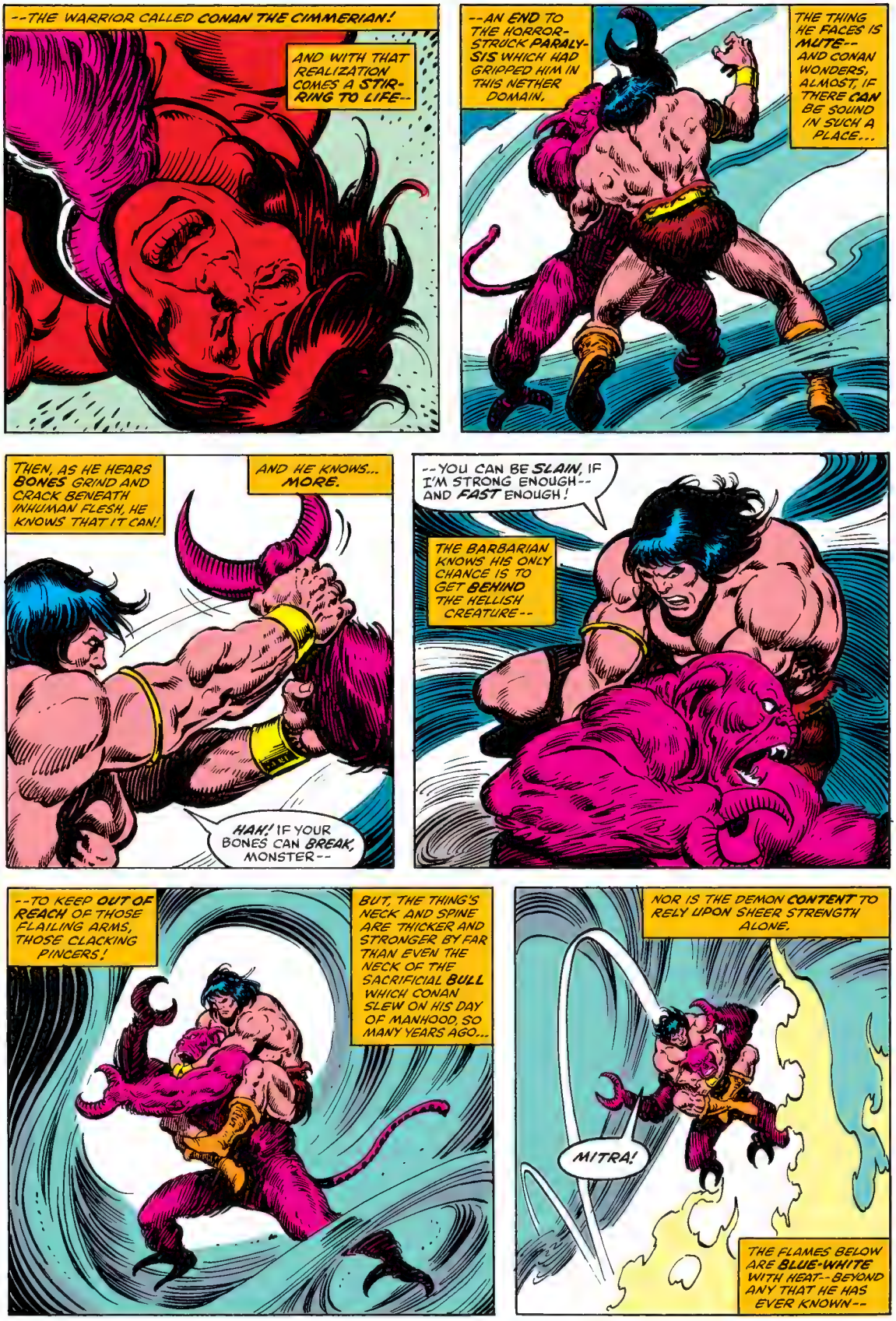

I FEEL-- SO--
STRANGE? AND WELL YOU SHOULD!
IT'S SAID RAKHAMON NEEDED THE RING TO CONTROL SOME OF THE MORE UN-YIELDING DEMONS HE SUMMONED FORTH...


WE SOON SHALL SEE!
PELIAS! WHAT THE DEVIL--?
BEFORE THE RING CAN SERVE YOU, CONAN, YOU FIRST MUST PROVE WORTHY OF IT.
ALREADY THE RING DRAWS YOU TO A PLACE WHICH IS NOT A PLACE...SO THAT YOUR TESTING MAY BEGIN...!

THERE IS NO ANSWER, AS CONAN FINDS HIMSELF STANDING WHERE THERE IS NEITHER EARTH BELOW, NOR SKY ABOVE...
PELIAS! CURSE YOU, WIZARD--
HOW MAY I USE THE RING? HOW??
...BUT ONLY IMMATERIAL, HOWLING SPIRITS...


...AND THEN, STRIDING FROM THE DARKNESS, THERE IS SUDDENLY--
--SOMETHING ELSE!
CROM PRESERVE ME!


EVEN AS THE CLAWED THING GRASPS HIS THROAT--
--HE SUDDENLY REALIZES HE IS GARBED NO LONGER AS AQUILONIA'S KING--
--BUT AS THE WANDERER THAT ONCE HE WAS--

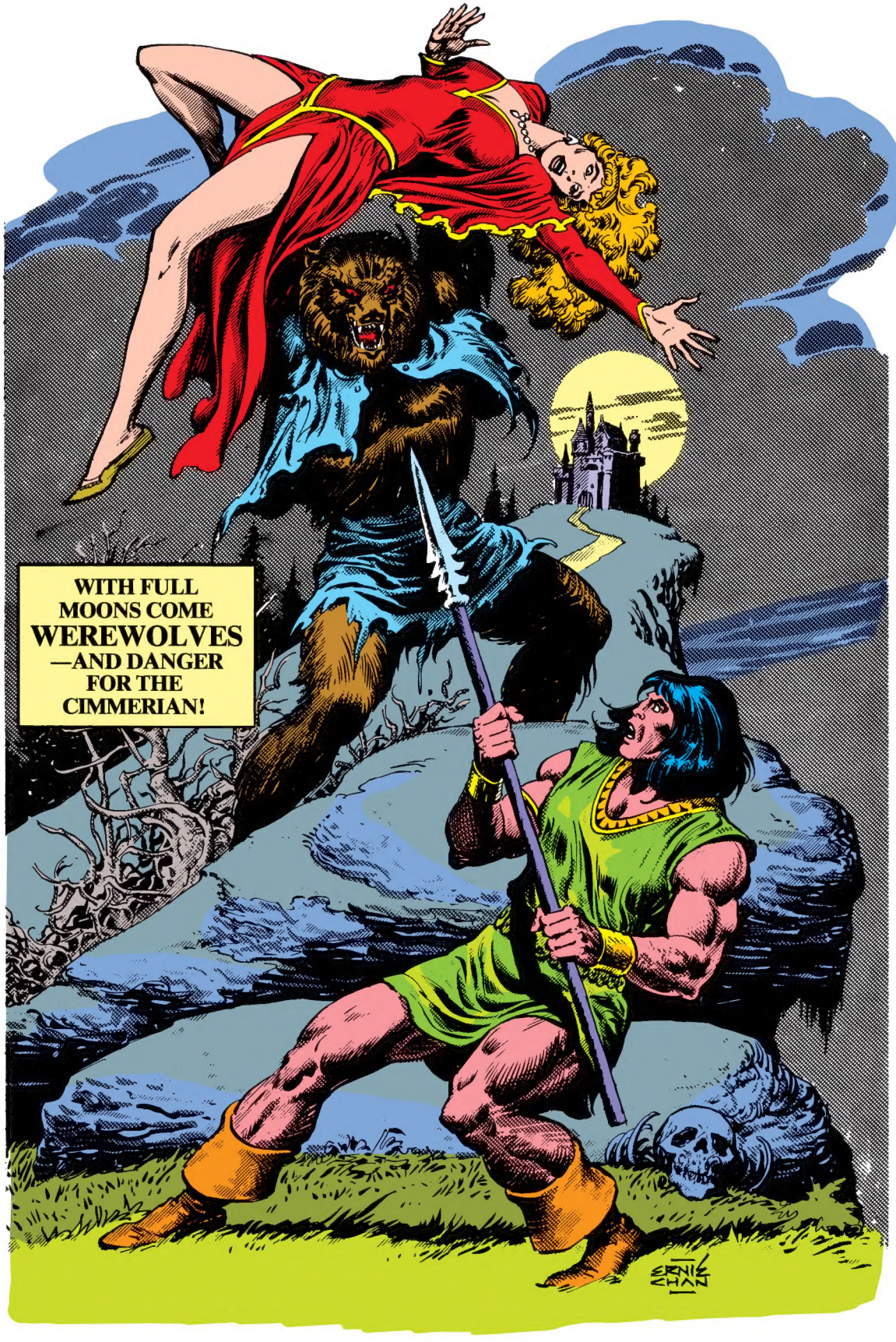

--THE WARRIOR CALLED CONAN THE CIMMERIAN!
AND WITH THAT REALIZATION COMES A STIR-RING TO LIFE--
--AN END TO THE HORROR-STRUCK PARALY-SIS WHICH HAD GRIPPED HIM IN THIS NETHER DOMAIN.
THE THING HE FACES IS MUTE-- AND CONAN WONDERS, ALMOST, IF THERE CAN BE SOUND IN SUCH A PLACE...
THEN, AS HE HEARS BONES GRIND AND CRACK BENEATH INHUMAN FLESH, HE KNOWS THAT IT CAN!
AND HE KNOWS... MORE.
HAH! IF YOUR BONES CAN BREAK, MONSTER--
--YOU CAN BE SLAIN, IF I'M STRONG ENOUGH-- AND FAST ENOUGH!
THE BARBARIAN KNOWS HIS ONLY CHANCE IS TO GET BEHIND THE HELLISH CREATURE--
--TO KEEP OUT OF REACH OF THOSE FLAILING ARMS, THOSE CLACKING PINCERS!
BUT, THE THING'S NECK AND SPINE ARE THICKER AND STRONGER BY FAR THAN EVEN THE NECK OF THE SACRIFICIAL BULL WHICH CONAN SLEW ON HIS DAY OF MANHOOD, SO MANY YEARS AGO...
NOR IS THE DEMON CONTENT TO RELY UPON SHEER STRENGTH ALONE.
MITRA!
THE FLAMES BELOW ARE BLUE-WHITE WITH HEAT--BEYOND ANY THAT HE HAS EVER KNOWN--

YET, THOUGH HE FEELS HIS SKIN BLISTERING, BURNING-- SMELLS HIS OWN FLESH COOKING, SPLITTING IN THE MADDENING HEAT--
--CONAN FIGHTS ON.
IF I MUST DIE-- IN THIS HELLISH PLACE--
--THEN LET IT BE IN BATTLE!
AND, FLINGING BACK HIS HEAD, HE GIVES ONCE MORE THE CIMMERIAN WAR-CRY HE VOICED DAYS AGO IN THE ROYAL PALACE IN TARANTIA--
--A SHOUT THAT SEEMS TO ECHO DOWN THE DARK CORRIDORS OF TIME ITSELF--
-- THEN CASCADES BACK UPON HIM, AS IF IT HAS HURLED ITSELF AGAINST THE FARTHEST BOUNDARIES OF THE UNIVERSE--
--AND NOT BEEN FOUND WANTING.
I AM ALIVE, THEN-- AND WHOLE?
IT SEEMS YOU HAVE PASSED THE RING'S OWN TEST, MY FRIEND.
THAT IS GOOD, FOR THE FOE YOU SEEK IS A GREATER SORCERER THAN ANY OF US IN THE WEST.
ONLY WITH THE RING'S AID CAN YOU HOPE TO PREVAIL, OR EVEN SURVIVE...
...WHEN YOU FACE YAH CHIENG, WHO DWELLS IN PAIKING IN FAR-OFF KHITAI.
YAH CHIENG? THAT, THEN IS THE NAME OF THE SORCERER WHO HAS TAKEN ZENOBIA?
AYE.
THEN, BEFORE I DEPART FOR THE EAST TOMORROW, I'LL SACRIFICE A BULLOCK TO CROM.
SAY NOTHING OF IT, LEST PEOPLE THINK CONAN GROWS RELIGIOUS IN HIS OLD AGE.
WITH THE DAWN, I RIDE FOR KHITAI.
I'LL NOT REST TILL MY WOMAN-- MY QUEEN-- IS RESTORED TO ME--
--AND YAH CHIENG LIES DEAD AT MY FEET!
NEXT: THE ROAD TO KHITAI!

AN ERNIE CHAN *CONAN* PORTFOLIO

If any one artist's name is almost as closely identified with Conan's comic mag adventures as that of Big John Buscema, it's the monniker ERNIE CHAN. Ernie, whose embellishing has graced many a Conan epic in our various magazines, is an accomplished pencil artist as well — as can be seen most recently in his just-completed heroic stint on the Conan newspaper strip. For this peerless portfolio, Ernie has combined his talents to render some unforgettable Conaniana.

A FINNY DOOM EXPLODES UPON A STARTLED BARBARIAN AND HIS WOMAN!


WITH FULL MOONS COME WEREWOLVES —AND DANGER FOR THE CIMMERIAN!
ERNIE CHAN

"...AND ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST!"
ERNIE CHAN

CONAN AND RED SONJA --
ERNIE CHAN
--PARTNERS IN PERIL IN A WORLD
ALL TOO FRAUGHT WITH DEATH!